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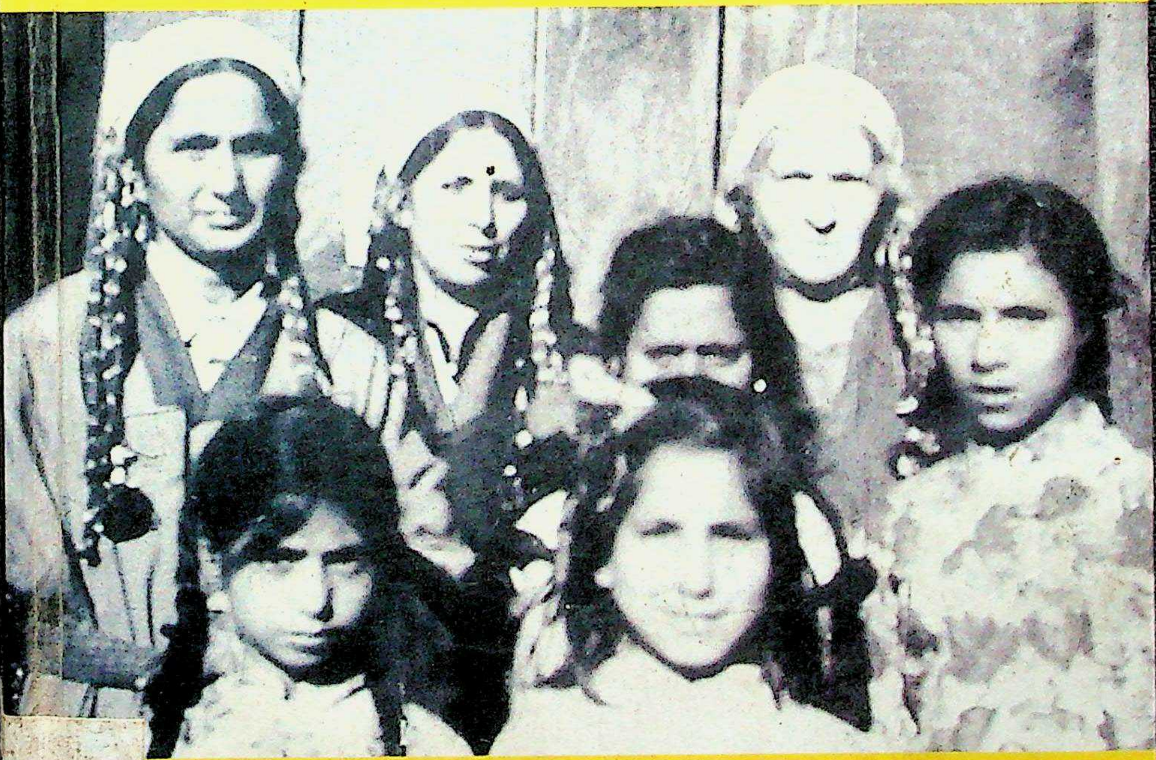
Kashmir
The History
&
Pandit Women's Struggle for Identity



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Suneethi Bakhshi

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Pandit Women's Struggle for Identity

Suneethi Bakhshi

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For All My Family

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Suneethi Bakhshi

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Foreword

I am delighted to write the foreword for this engaging and delightful study by Professor Suneethi Bakhshi. I am not aware of any other work which covers the same ground in such a clear and accessible manner. The Kashmiri Pandit Community, as we all know, is in deep transition. The valley of Kashmir—which was their home for generations—has today, at most, a few thousand of the Pandit community living there. The rest of the Pandit population is living in other towns of Jammu and Kashmir state, or scattered all over India and some are even part of the diaspora internationally.

Identities are social constructions, and the Pandit identity is a product of historical, political, and societal circumstances. Kashmiri Pandit women have, however, played a critical role in the transmission and preservation of Kashmiri Pandit culture—which forms bedrock of their identity—despite several migrations from the Valley to escape persecution. In today's troubled times with the Valley engulfed in violence, and the forces of globalization threatening to marginalize all but the most robust cultures, will the Kashmiri Pandit way of life survive? But identities then have a curious way of operation; the more threatened they are, the more resilient they become.

Kashmiri Pandits, ironically, have become more conscious of themselves, their lifestyle and cultural practices over the last decade or so. Suneethi Bakhshi's book will serve two objectives. First, it is an inquiry into the role played by women in ensuring

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that Kashmiri Pandit culture survives. And second, it is a book that informs and educates and will be extremely useful for the new generation of Pandits born outside the Valley and who may not even have had a chance of visiting Kashmir. Professor Bakhshi needs to be congratulated for producing such a fine book. It is an essential reading for all Kashmiris.

Amitabh Mattoo
Former Vice Chancellor
University of Jammu

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Introduction

The seeds of this book go a long way back to 1965 to a paper that I was required to write on 'The Rites of Passage of Your Community' for a Sociology course at the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University of Baroda.

For one whose roots are deeply embedded in North Malabar in Kerala, but having been born and brought up in Mumbai, I had very limited exposure to our own culture and rites of passage. Even back then Mumbai was a very cosmopolitan city. Ours was a Convent school education. The only time we spent in our parent's hometown was during our school's summer vacations. Our lifestyle at home was a cross-cultural mix—Malayali/Tamil (both parents had their college education in Chennai, formerly Madras), with a few odd additional Scottish/English touches from our father, who had lived and trained as a Government of India Scholar in Scotland and England for five years during and after the First World War.

Though both our parents as leaders of their community in Mumbai were actually involved for years with the Kerala Samaj and Kerala Mahila Samaj, our exposure to the culture of Kerala was limited to a few rituals at home and observance of *Vishu*, the Kerala New Year, and *Onam*, the harvest festival. Both these social, rather religious festivals, are celebrated by a whole cross-section of the Kerala society irrespective of religion, caste, or social status.

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We were also exposed to several generations of relatives: cousins, aunts, uncles, maternal grandmother, great grandmother, great aunts and uncles. Some of these distant and not-so distant relatives visited us, along with people from our hometown who arrived in Mumbai for whatever reason, and needed a place to stay till they got settled on their own or went their way. Our father happened to be the first person from his hometown to have built a home for his family in the metropolitan city. Under these rather peculiar circumstances, and with only a negligible knowledge of the rites of passage of our own community, I faced a serious dilemma about the choice of the community I would write about.

By 1965, I had been married to a Kashmiri Pandit for eight years during the course of which, living in an extended family (as opposed to our nuclear family in Mumbai), I had many opportunities to observe the family and community from close quarters, and to participate in them. My keen involvement in the social functions of the family helped determine my choice of the community I would write about.

At that time, in Baroda, with few other sources available for research, and in order to broaden my limited knowledge of the subject, I was fortunate to be able to tap a wonderfully willing and ready source in the wife of the then Registrar of the University. The late couple, Shri Brij Kishan Zutshi and his wife, Sushila, was from the 'old' Kashmiri community, whose families had migrated out of the Valley several generations before to Lahore and Allahabad. And it was from his position at the Allahabad University that Zutshi Saheb had come to take over as the Registrar at Baroda University.

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A childless couple living in a sprawling bungalow on campus, they welcomed all the Kashmiri students living in the Halls of Residence into their home, to celebrate Kashmiri festivals, or to just make them feel more at home. Married as I was to a Kashmiri who happened to be a former and well-known student of the University, they took me under their wing. It was a critical time in my life and marriage that forced me to return to Baroda with three very young children, sans my husband, to resume my studies there.

Smt Zutshi gave me a vast store of information about rites, rituals and traditions of the Kashmiri Pandits, but I realized, as I took notes, that what she relayed to me reflected a much earlier time from their own exodus from the Valley, following intolerance and atrocities against the community. There was much that had changed in the valley and the observances of the community since that time. My own experience over eight years of marriage had helped me realize that though change is inevitable over centuries in any society, the changes that have come about in the Kashmiri Pandit culture and psyche since then had not always kept pace with their own, and the needs of the times.

Though the earliest migrants were caught up in a time warp, they had attempted faithfully to retain their identity and culture which had, out of necessity, been tempered by their own travails and compulsions following their ouster from their homeland. These had been done in a realistic and pragmatic manner keeping in mind their straitened circumstances, yet retaining and maintaining the essence of those rites of passage and their earlier 'value system'. This was the situation, as I understood it

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in the 1960s. In the early 1990s, following yet another traumatic exodus of this miniscule community from the Valley while they scattered all over the country and world-wide to seek and make new lives, it must have woken them up to the desperate need to hold on to their identity and the essential aspects of their earlier culture and lifestyle which had fast begun to fall apart in their new circumstances.

It was at this point in time, during 1993, that community leaders in Delhi, the Kashmir Sabha, decided to hold a seminar on the role of Kashmiri Pandit women. I was approached by my friend, Professor Susheela Bhan, to present a paper on 'The Kashmiri Pandit Community in Transition: The Role of the Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Culture'. I had, by then, unlike in 1965, had almost 40 years of living and working experience in an extended family and gained considerable knowledge about that culture.

Also with my innate curiosity and interest in any new situation in which I found myself, I had sought and found enough sources outside my home to study the community and culture. My 11-year stint at the Teachers' College in Srinagar not only allowed me access to the rich resourceful library there which contains an elaborate list of writings of earlier observers over the centuries, but also to have enlightening discussions with my colleagues, mostly male, who were encouraged by our then Principal, Begum Sajda Zamir Ahmed, to keep alive the spirit of inquiry and debate. Other sources that greatly helped me were the elders within my family, neighbourhood, and community, including Professor Shymalal Dhar, Professor Jaya Lal Kaul, and Shri Vasu Dev Zadoo. Discussion with, and advise

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from my few friends and well wishers in the absence of my own family in times of personal crises, helped me gain insights and valuable knowledge.

It is said that an 'outsider' makes the best observer of events, and in this instance, culture. Perhaps this justifies Professor Bhan's choice of me to write on that particular topic. Over the decades, I had been just an outsider; though very much part of a Kashmiri Pandit family and the community, yet always treated as an outsider; trying to study my situation and ponder on the factors that contributed to their being what they had become.

A quotation from Ira Pande's Prologue in *Diddi—My Mother's Voice* seems very appropriate here. She quotes her Guru Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi in a lecture:

> "The common people around you are a treasure. Remember that they represent a rich cultural tradition: make them the subject of your study. Look closely at the people you work with, observe their language, thoughts, their social units, their lifestyles and beliefs. You will learn more from them than from hours spent in a library or museum. Yet remember you must interact with them in a responsible manner: do all you can to understand their past, see their present, and prepare to face their future. In short learn from them and teach them."

With the events of 1989 and 1990, and the scattering of the community that forced them out into the wider Indian and Hindu mainstream, the community itself must have felt the urgent need for introspection, arising out of the imperative to fit into their changed scenario. It struck me then, that fortunately for them, this community had an inherent determined resilience that had allowed it to adapt itself through the millennia, which

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it had traversed; enabling it to survive, even when drastically reduced through persecutions and the various transitions it had endured. It also made me realize with a tremendous impact that the sustaining force through all those transitions and centuries was the Kashmiri Pandit woman. Her ability to bend and blend, fight and resist had helped to preserve the community's identity and culture through all the various vicissitudes through time. She had borne the brunt of the forces that had battered the community—physical, social, and the events of history.

It is also through the latest of these transitions that the community had been able to strengthen their links with the earlier migrants of more recent centuries, as well as discover their earliest connections with the Saraswat Brahmins, who themselves had been scattered all over the country. This helped the community to trace their descent from the Indo-Europeans, the Aryans, from the region of the Caucasus. Aryans were pastoral people who moved ever eastward through several adaptive phases before they migrated to the Indo-Gangetic plains and settled on the fertile banks of the river Saraswati.

The paper I eventually prepared and presented at the seminar drew on all these facts, though using fewer resources and sources limited by inaccessibility at the time but fortified by my own experiences. Also, as a woman and remembering my own experiences as a new bride transplanted into a totally alien environment and culture, and the considerable culture shock I had then experienced, helped me better understand and identify with those women from those ancient and more primitive times. Their attempts to cope with the exigencies they had to deal with through all those transitions, until they settled into their longest

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sojourn in the Kashmir Valley must have been times of some of their greatest trials and tribulations.

Those women, with their dauntless pioneering efforts, were the pivots around which their families' and community's well-being revolved, and on which their identity was determined. The patriarch and their menfolk could only flourish in the cocoon of comfort that their womenfolk had created through peaceful times. There is need to acknowledge the contribution made by the women in helping to preserve their identity and transmitting their culture to the present time. This book is my tribute to those women. Life teaches one many lessons and our teachers come to us in different forms. There is need to look periodically within ourselves and it is not merely the men who need to do it but the Kashmiri Pandit woman of today needs to introspect and ask herself where she and the community need to go from here.

Lastly every writer has her own reasons for her writing. For me, since my retirement from teaching, my writings have been largely for my family, particularly for my grandchildren, who are growing up on three continents and have never known life in Kashmir. I had hoped the organizers of the seminar would have put together the papers presented in a volume that would have helped the future generations, who are scattered worldwide, to know exactly who they are, where they come from, and the pivotal role their women have played in the preservation of their way of life. This is especially so in the light of the fact that with the passage of time and world events, their hopes of ever returning to their homeland fade further. This is my small effort to give to the family and the larger community at least some part of what might have been a much richer whole.

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ONE

Transitions of a People

"As individuals, we are all, at least in part, product of our histories, which include our geographical place, our times, our social classes, and our family backgrounds."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), p ix

"We research our genealogy..."

"Recent developments in science make it possible to go beyond the printed records. The decoding of DNA means that scientists can trace an individual's ancestry back through the mother's line and can find others with the same genetic makeup. As the databases of information build up, it becomes increasingly possible to see how human beings have migrated over the years."

"DNA has suddenly opened the door to self knowledge."

Margaret MacMillan, *ibid*, pp 5, 6, 7

1.1 Origin: Aryans the Indo-Europeans

What compels one initially to wonder about the origins of the Kashmiri Pandit community is their facial contours. In any large congregation of members of the community, one cannot but note the fact that they have rather strikingly different looks, unlike what one would expect to see in other parts of the country. They run to various racial archetypes, presenting

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a wide spectrum of skin and eye colour, from which the odd blue-eyed blonde, milky-skinned, freckled, hazel-eyed red heads or the really tawny and quite often dark, swarthy complexion types will stand out.

> *"The people of Kachemire are proverbial for their complexions and fine forms... The women especially are very handsome; it is from this country that nearly every individual when first admitted to the court of Great Mughal, selects wives or concubines that his children may be whiter than the Indians and pass as genuine Mughals."*[1]
>
> Francois Bernier

Facial features and physiques range from the Greek god and goddess-like looks, to high cheek boned, slant-eyed, flat-nosed and stockier Mongolian types that one can expect to see in the trans-Himalayan regions. There are also the fierce-looking, strapping darker Semitic types with strong aquiline noses, and oddly enough, one even finds the darker Dravidian types which are normally associated with south of the Vindhyas. After the initial and somewhat shocked reaction to what one observes, anyone familiar with the long history of the region has less reason to wonder about these wide variations of ethnicity in the community. The history and evolution of this community can be traced from the remote past—from five to eight thousand years ago—to the present time. Out of this will emerge a clearer picture that will elucidate who the Kashmiri Pandits are, where they come from, and hopefully it will also show them where to go from their present situation since their mass exodus from the Valley following the events of late 1989 and early 1990. More importantly, it will help Kashmiri Pandit women see more clearly how they have survived these millennia through some of the worst possible scenarios—environmental, social and political.

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"Every generation must rewrite history. New facts become available and old facts are interpreted anew,"[2] states Ranjit Sitaram Pandit in his 'Invitation' to the English translation of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. His work was initially published in 1935, and subsequently reprinted in 1968 and 1977. Through his 'Translator's Note', 'Invitation' and several appendices, he gives us a scholarly exposition of Kalhana's work in English for those who cannot read it in its original form which was written in Sanskrit. This work also enables present day students of history of Kashmir to obtain a vivid picture of the lives and times of the Kashmiri people extending over more than two thousand years from 1184 BC to 1151 AD. Going as far back as that in time, it also gives us some idea of the earliest period during which the Aryan tribes first migrated to the Kashmir Valley from their previous locations in the plains of North India, and their settlements in the water sheds of the river systems of the Indus and the Ganges.

The late 19th and early 20th Centuries saw the findings of archaeology reveal the secrets of the unknown past of humankind, as a result of which new theories were formulated about ancient civilizations and migrations of people. Pandit uses the new findings of his time to help us trace the origins of the Aryan people, and the routes of their eastward migration. This led these people from their original homeland in the region of the Caspian Sea bordering Western Turkey and Turkmenia, through West Asia to Central Asia, and eventually to the Indian subcontinent.

It was the search for authentic ancient records that led to the development of archaeology as an emerging field of study. The discovery and deciphering of such records, whether in the form of hieroglyphics or clay tablets with the Cuneiform script of ancient Assyria, Mesopotamia and Persia led one to the realization that

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much of the history taught in Europe about ancient civilizations at the time needed to be revised and rewritten.[2]

Earlier, European culture was believed to have originated from the Graeco-Romans who had built a great civilization from simple crude beginnings. Another school of thought attributed the rise of the European culture to the Judaic tradition out of which arose most of the religions and ethical ideas that dominate Europe and the western world even today. But archaeological findings in the mid 19th Century revealed another picture. The oldest of civilizations were the precursors of the cultures of Greece, Rome and Jerusalem.

Almost all great civilizations and cultures of the ancient world grew and were centred on the river valleys. Civilization is not based only on men, but needs a cultivable plant which will give high yields of storage food for both man and the animals that will help him sustain life; animals to carry loads, provide a means of transport and to plough his land. He also needs plants or animals that will yield fibre for his clothing.[2] Old world civilizations were based in areas that provided for these. The river systems of the world made this possible. Nomadic tribes of hunters and gatherers were constantly in the quest for such places to settle down to an agrarian way of life, which was more secure and comfortable than their earlier precarious way of life.

The waters and rich loamy soil of river banks supported agriculture. Irrigation techniques and systems helped in extending the land under production. The great civilizations of the then known ancient world were centred around the Nile in Egypt, the Euphrates and Tigris in West Asia, the Yangtze in China and the Indus and Ganges in India. Rivers that were as navigable as these made transportation and trade feasible,

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leading to the growth of cities around the trading centres. As these cities grew and expanded, they provided for a way of life that encouraged leisure and intellectual stimulation of people to inquire into the nature of matter and the universe, giving rise to science and philosophy.

The ideas, ideals and aspirations of people found expression through literature, music and art. This gave rise to great civilizations. The progress of civilizations followed man's ever-growing control over natural forces and materials through his growing knowledge of them and the application of such knowledge. The development of language as a means of communication and writing, and the organization of society on the basis of religion, legal and social systems resulted in the formation of the first city states, which further expanded and confederated into nations. Religions which initially grew out of small communities later influenced larger states and widened their reach to beyond the frontiers of nations to the wider world.[2]

The earliest culture in the then known world was that which developed along the banks of the upper and lower Nile. The first farming communities were established in the Nile Valley in 6000 BC. By 4500 BC, agriculture was well established in Egypt and the first settlements emerged in the upper Nile Valley. Writing was developed in 3000 BC, with the hieroglyphics being transformed into alphabetic writing on stone and papyrus. Gradually, medicine and mathematics were born, with the latter helping in building the Pyramids. By 1500 BC, the Egyptian territories extended as far as Syria, but slowly declined after the defeat of the Nubian Pharoah Tanutanum's forces in 671 BC by the Hittites (from the Anatolian region in Turkey) and the Assyrians (in what is now Iraq). The Hittites are credited with

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discovering the techniques for iron smelting which generated great wealth. They also had a very efficient system of government and law.[3a&b]

A very advanced civilization was developing in Mesopotamia in the fertile valley between the Euphrates and Tigris. The Sumerians were the first to use irrigation in these valleys. From 5000 BC onwards, the Assyrians of the north and the Babylonians in the south developed the Cuneiform script; and the mathematical genius and technical advances of the Sumerians contributed in the making of a vigorous culture that spread towards east and west. Several other achievements marked these civilizations. The potter's wheel and wheeled vehicles were developed in Mesopotamia in 3300 BC. The Sumerians were the ones to pioneer the Cuneiform writing, which was adopted later throughout West Asia and the Middle East, and later came to India as the script for Urdu. In Mathematics, they divided the circle into 360 degrees, a degree into 60 minutes and a minute into 60 seconds. The Babylonian Empire under King Hammurabi (1792–1750 BC) passed the great Code of Law. The Assyrians achieved their military superiority with the use of iron weapons and siege engines, enabling them to conquer the Eastern Mediterranean region. King Ashurbanipal of the Assyrians collected a library of 20,000 tablets. The far-reaching influences of these civilizations covered the period from before 2000 BC, starting with the Sumerians, to 539 BC, which saw the eclipse of the Assyrians at the hands of the Persians.[3a&b]

From 539 BC up to the onset of 3rd Century BC, the Persian Empire and civilization rose to the east of the region under its founder, Cyrus. Zoroastrianism, the state religion, adopted Ahura Mazda, the God of Light, as the Supreme Deity. Zarathustra, the

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religion's prophet, preached that salvation could be achieved by faith in the God of Light who triumphs over evil. The empire extended from the Nile to the Indus, and in 1331 BC, it fell after being defeated by Alexander the Great, who ushered in Greek culture to the region. Science and philosophy spread in the 70 cities established by him from Alexandria in Egypt throughout his territories even up to the Indus in India.[3a&b]

While all these civilizations flourished and perished after assaults from others, the Jewish nation rose, founded by Abraham around 2000 BC. The early captivity of the Jews by Egypt came around 1600 BC, which consequently led to their exodus from Egypt in 1200 BC. They were led by Moses who gave them the Ten Commandments received from God. After long migrations, they finally settled in the 'Promised Land' of Palestine in 1000 BC under the rule of David and Solomon, who ruled from Jerusalem until its destruction by Babylonia, and the subsequent captivity of the Jews around 650 BC. Thereafter, the Jews lived under foreign rule until the second fall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans came about around 150 BC and led to their dispersal out of Palestine. Their contribution to world civilizations was primarily religious, with the writing of most of the Old and New Testaments that paved the way for both Christianity and Islam.[3a&b]

What connects the Aryans to all these early civilizations (except the Jewish one) is the theory that in their progression eastwards over the millennia from their original homeland in the region of the Caspian Sea, they passed through all these various civilizations. As these empires and civilizations progressively rose and fell to assaults from their eastern neighbours (with the exception of the Greek conqueror Alexander), the Indo-

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Europeans had varying periods of sojourns in each of these, before moving on eastwards. In fact, the longest period of such a settlement of these people was in ancient Persia. Moreover, the term 'Arya' and their 'Aryan' identity were established in this phase of their transition from the interactions with the Zoroastrians in ancient Persia. According to one theory, the eastern part of Iran was where the Aryans lived as one people until they separated into the Iranians, who stayed on there, and the Indo-Aryans, who moved into the Indian subcontinent.

This is a community that is familiar with migration and diaspora, and the earliest of such migrations was not the result of persecution or harassment, but simply in a search for a more providing environment and habitat for what was then nomadic people. The Aryan tribes, from which the Kashmiri Pandits claim descent, had their original homeland in the region of the Caspian Sea.[4] It was probably some natural cause such as poor grazing lands or hunting grounds that forced them to undertake their movement from there, taking them eastwards through Central Asia, eventually to the Himalayas and through the few passes in the north-west into the more fertile plains of North India. Pandit, describing this corridor into the plains of India, states:

> *"From the plain of Makran, the shores of which are washed by the Arabian Sea, up to the pine-clad highlands of Kashmir, broadly speaking, runs the north-west frontier of India. The road from Peshawar to the formidable walls of the trans-Indus mountains, connecting the Kabul river valley with the plains of India, passes through the Khyber Pass. Through this inlet have flowed successive waves of Aryan, Assyrian, Medea, Iranian, Greek, Scythian, Turkish and Turco-Mongol migrations into India."*

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They were, however, not the first people to do so. Before them, as early as the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, the then primitive indigenous people of Negrito stock of Indian peninsular had been driven southwards by Mongol invaders, Mon-khmers, from Central Asia.[4] The admixture of these two racial strains resulted in the Dravidian or pre-Aryan culture of India. These Dravidians were displaced by Aryan settlers near the close of the first millennium BC. In the case of Aryans, it was probably their superior armaments, knowledge of metal working and their superior religious outlook that made them masters of the new Indian world. They succeeded in establishing their supremacy over the Dravidian population partly by conquest, and partly by assimilation.[4]

The history of India and its people is bound up with the geographic nature of this vast subcontinent. Bounded on three sides by the ocean, the Indian peninsula—with the high impregnable mountain range of the Himalayas stretching across its northern boundary from Baluchistan to Assam—is almost sealed off from the Asian heartland on the other side, except for the few passes in the north-west. Whatever racial and cultural influences came through these from time to time over the centuries, tended to be retained and absorbed.

Early Indian history is a narration of the constant incursions and invasions from the north-west, which brought the indigenous people of the subcontinent into contact with alien races and the influence of foreign cultures on its history. Over the ages, Indian society and thought have been shaped by the cultures with which its people came into contact, producing many religions and their great religious leaders.

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The Dravidians, who after 2000 BC had settled in the Indus Valley, were responsible for the growth of a flourishing civilization there—the Indus Valley Civilization. The excavations at the Harrapan site give evidence of distinctive pottery and well-designed and well-laid out cities with drainage systems, probably better than that of some modern cities. They established several city communities in the Indus Valley. They were the first to introduce irrigation system in India in order to enhance agricultural production. With the river navigable in its passage through the plains, the first trade contacts were made with other communities, including the distant river civilizations of Mesopotamia.[3a&b] There is reason to believe that this facilitated the early cultural exchanges between the two civilizations. The well-ordered system of government in the Indus Valley civilization could have resulted from those early exchanges.

Nature worship and reverence of Mother Goddess of the earliest primitive tribes was absorbed into the subsequent religious thoughts and practices of every new wave of immigrants into India from the north-west. These immigrants pushed the original inhabitants ever further to the south, to be confined to the tribal pockets and belts that they occupy today.

It was around 1700 BC that the first incursions into the Indus Valley by the Aryan tribes from the north-west took place. They overcame the Dravidians in the Indus Valley and settled down there. This led to the decline of the Dravidian civilization. However, with probably a degree of intermarriage between the Aryans and Dravidians, the process of assimilation began and the spread of the Aryans through the Indo-Gangetic plains commenced.

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The major settlements of the Aryans were around the River Saraswati.[5] This settled phase fostered the development of the Hindu religion, and the evolution of the caste system. The Aryan victors formed the two superior castes dominating the caste hierarchy—the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas, who were the ruling class. The defeated people and the progeny of those who intermarried with them were the Vaishyas and Shudras, and the lowest rungs of the caste hierarchy, with those performing the most menial tasks outside the pale of the caste system.

This was also the period when the early Hindus produced their greatest literature in the form of the epic poems and religious hymns—the *Rig Veda*. Hindu religious thought evolved beyond its earlier Zoroastrian teachings of faith in the God of Light, that is the Sun, and its earthly equivalent of fire which were earlier worshipped by the Aryans in their Iranian and Central Asian phases of transition.[4] It now evolved to include its belief in Brahman as the Supreme God-Head, the Creator. The idea of salvation of the individual soul through knowledge and its evolution over successive births became central to Hindu philosophy.

1.2 The Saraswat Brahmins

The cultural systems of India have been determined by the great river systems of North India—the water sheds of the Indus and the Ganges, and their tributaries that nurtured the people and civilizations that were established on the fertile banks of these rivers. If civilization is dependent on a cultivable plant which can yield an ample harvest to support life of man and the animals on which he depends, it is important to look at this aspect of its development. The world's oldest civilizations depended on cereals

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such as wheat, barley and rice which provided man with the food he needed. The animals he domesticated and tamed for his use were cow, sheep, buffalo, horse and elephant, depending on the regions where he settled down to an agrarian way of life.

Studies by Vavilov and other Russian scientists in the early 20th Century helped to trace origins of a civilization to its source by the study of wheat and its varieties. Two main sources and centres were identified—the first was in Abyssinia in Northeastern Africa, from where man's earliest migrations to Asia and Europe took place. Abyssinia is taken to be the original home of agriculture, from where it led up to the Upper and Lower Nile Valleys and the Egyptian civilization. The Egyptian civilization was the source of both the Mesopotamian and Indian varieties of wheat, and of those more important varieties that grow in Europe and North America today. There are cultivated plants today that have originated in other parts of the world. However, rye, carrots, some types of lentils and beans, flax and cotton are said to have originated in the Gandhara region of Afghanistan.[2]

Gandhara in Eastern Afghanistan, as we know from both the *Rig Veda* and the *Avesta*, was the meeting place of the Indo-Europeans and the Iranians. It was here that they had a long stopover before the invasion of Alexander; also it was here that a close contact between the two cultures was made and greatest exchanges between them took place before the Indo-Aryans made their move into India.

Gandhara, also known as Udyana (the garden land of India), was a part of Ashoka's Indian empire which extended well beyond the mountain barriers of the Himalayas. It was the home of grammarians such as Panini; scholars and philosophers who drew

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from their philosophy and religion of their earlier transitions, and evolved the Hindu religion which dominated the Indian scene once they moved there.[2,5]

In Ashoka's time, it was also the birth place of the greatest Buddhist thinkers and physicians. Kashmir, after the influx of the Saraswat Brahmins to the Valley, was greatly influenced by the Buddhist culture even after the decline of Buddhism there. This was because Gandhara was intimately connected with it. Meghavahana, ruler of Kashmir and an apostle of non-violence, came from Gandhara.

With Alexander's invasion of Persia in 331 BC, Gandhara became the home of the Graeco-Buddhist culture which was shared by the Iranians too. Early Kashmiri art and architecture was greatly influenced by the Graeco-Buddhist culture. That this influence persisted even until the 14th Century when Kalhana wrote his chronicles, is seen from its profound impact on Kalhana's mind and thinking, expressing itself in his verses in the first three cantos which dealt with great sensitivity on non-violence and charity—the basic practices of Buddhism.[2]

These were the influences that the Indo-Aryans brought to India when they moved in to settle in the region of the Indus and its tributaries. It is significant that even today this region is the major wheat-growing area of the subcontinent. The life of its people, even today, centres around agriculture, and their culture and way of life and ethnicity reflects a vigorous manifestation of all the influences that came their way from the north-west, mainly by way of incursions and invasions over time.

One can draw a close parallel between these and the factors and influences that shaped the Aryan communities that first

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settled in the region of the Shivaliks on the banks of the river Saraswati. This river is a tributary of the sacred river Ganges that flows through an immense tract stretching from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. These Aryans—the Saraswats—taking their name from both the river and their progenitor Saraswat Muni, who was the son of the sage Dadichi and his wife Saraswati, were the forefathers of the present Kashmiri Pandit community.

The preserved writings of the Epic Period (1500 BC-600 BC) have ample evidences to prove that early Saraswats were preoccupied with religious thoughts and speculation on the nature of the world. Already they had come a long way in religious thought and philosophy from their earlier emphasis—in their Iranian phase of transition—on the practical, real world and codification of moral duty that characterized the *Zend Avesta* of Zoraster.[4]

In the idyllic surroundings, in which they settled, in the fertile river Valleys of the Indo-Gangetic plain, the Aryans personified natural objects. This is evidenced in their early hymns composed to honour the sacred rivers, mountains, springs and lakes which they peopled with spirits such as the *Yakshas*, *Yoginis*, *Nagas* and *Naginis* as in their later move and settlement in the Kashmir Valley.[2] These old beliefs have come down even to modern times as in the practise of *Khichri Amavasya*, and propitiation of the *Ghar Devta* on special occasions.

The Aryans, in their early Indian phase, did not demolish the gods and religious beliefs of the people whom they conquered or displaced. Tolerance was the characteristic of all religions of Indian origin. This is testified by Chinese scholars and pilgrims who came to India from 4th to 11th Centuries. The pantheism

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that later developed, following their influx into India, was a result of their contacts with, and assimilation of the earlier Dravidian forms of religion with its celebration and affirmation of life and nature, which changed under the Aryans to an absorption in the Godhead.[4]

In those early days, all Brahmins were known as Saraswats—worshippers of the Goddess of Learning, that is Saraswati. They were known for their erudition and are mentioned in the *Vedas*, the *Ramayana*, *Mahabbharata*, the *Bhagvad Gita* and the *Bhavishyottara Purana*. *Manu Smriti* and the *Puranas* refer to the Saraswat as 'Vipra', a Brahmin who practises what he preaches. The early Saraswats were particular about chaste diction and correct articulation of Sanskrit, their language and also the language of the Vedas. But at home, they spoke Brahmini—a language bereft of the ornate flourishes and tongue-twisting *sandhis* of classical Sanskrit. Hindu culture witnessed its golden period in the 3rd Century AD. Scholarship in Mathematics, Astronomy and Architecture made great forward strides.[5]

However, from this settled existence on the banks of the Saraswati, the Saraswats were rudely displaced. The river, because of adverse geophysical and climatic modifications, changed its course five times during their stay there. Famine displaced them but later, after 12 years when prosperity returned to the region, they returned there. When they did, Saraswat Muni initiated 60,000 of his people into the Vedic lore.[5]

When the river finally disappeared by going underground, there was a mass migration of Saraswats in search of a more conducive environment. This search took them eastwards along the courses of the Yamuna and Ganga, and northwards

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to the fertile plains of the Indus and further on to Kashmir.[5] For those who would question the existence of the 'mythical Saraswati'—the third of the sacred rivers that are said to meet at the Triveni Sangam—recent satellite sensor photographic images from space have revealed the course of the underground river. This mass migration represented yet another phase of the transition of this community.

For the migrants who reached the Kashmir Valley, which was already inhabited by the indigenous Naga tribes, the Valley provided an ideal environment for their settlement. However, it was quite different from what they had known in the plains of North India. The Valley was very fertile owing to the draining of the waters of the original Satisar Lake. This Valley provided for yet another environment and change of life style and culture for these people. With their migration to the Kashmir Valley, the history of this community was no longer a matter of conjecture or controversy. The *Nilamata Purana* records the early experiences of the community on their advent into the Kashmir Valley, and the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana, written in 1148-49 AD chronicles the history of Kashmir from the earliest times to 1150 AD. Jonaraja and Srivara trace their subsequent histories down until the advent of Islam to Kashmir in the 14th Century. Over the 5,000 odd years since then, marking the Saptarishi Era, these people emerged as a distinct community—the Saraswat Brahmins of Kashmir. The Kali Saptrishi Samvat, currently running year 5084, is the calendar followed by the Kashmiri Pandits even today.

These Brahmins were not the only Aryans who had migrated to the Valley; there were also the *Varna Vibhaga*, that is the Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras of the Hindu caste system.

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The Brahmins however, having negotiated an agreement with the Nagas, were in a dominant position as they laid down the rules and regulations for the other castes. They were themselves committed to spiritual pursuit, withdrawal and contemplation. Dictated by their geographical isolation from the rest of the country, though originally Aryan Vedic, their social life and religious behaviour developed distinctive features that were different from Brahmin tradition elsewhere in India.

From the earliest recorded times since their advent into the Valley, up to as late as 1586 AD with the exception of a few periods in its long history, (when it formed part of larger kingdoms and empires), Kashmir maintained its political identity with its own dynasties—Hindu and Muslim. A political and cultural history from those early times to the present will reveal the major events that shaped the Kashmiri Pandit community and its culture.

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TWO

The History of Kashmir Down the Ages

"...History is not a dead subject. It does not lie there safely in the past for us to look at when the mood takes us. History can be helpful; it can also be very dangerous. It is wiser to think of history, not as a pile of dead leaves or a collection of dusty artefacts, but as a pool, sometimes benign, often sulphurous, which lies under the present, silently shaping our institutions, our ways of thought, our likes and dislikes."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), pp x and xi

"Sometimes we abuse history, creating bad or false histories to justify treating others badly, seizing their land, for example or killing them...

The past can be used for almost anything you want to do in the present. We abuse it when we create lies about the past or write histories that show only one perspective."

Margaret MacMillan, *ibid*, pp ix

2.1 *Rajatarangini*: Hindu and Buddhist Periods

In the introduction to his translation of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*—a chronicle of the kings of Kashmir—Aurel Stein comments on the generally-held view of historians of his time, that "India of the Hindus... possessed no history". If we view this statement from examples of the early histories of Greece and Rome, or

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from the modern standards of historiography, there is some truth in this remark. However, though there may be a lack of a formal history of India from the earliest times, there are other original sources of materials which record events or tradition, such as inscriptions on stone, copper plates, pillars and coins, which bear testimony to the occurrence of significant events and date them.

A large part of the records of Indian history are found in early Sanskrit and other regional language literatures of the subcontinent; in Indian epics such as the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. They are also interwoven in myths and legends of popular folklore and literature, and echoed in folk songs, dance and other cultural manifestations. This traditional lore is not historical in its form, but rather religious and intended to instruct successive generations even to this day through captivating and entertaining media which has universal appeal.

Sanskrit poetry—the *Kavyas* or *Charitas*—of those early times often reflects historical themes, and also provides the supporting structure which allows the poet to elaborate on the exploits of his patron, who was usually the king or ruler. As a source of historical information, the *kavya* covers significant contemporary events, though often coloured by a formal expression of praise of the exploits of his patron. This can often result in a lack of clear and authentic reporting of facts regarding events and their causes, which were known to the readers of that time. This tends to make such narratives less historical than one would expect of history as we define it today: a recorded narrative of past events concerning a particular period, people or nation or an individual.

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The *Rajatarangini*, literally meaning "the River of Kings", is the earliest recorded history of Kashmir. It was written in 1148–49 AD by the well-known historian Kalhana. Unlike later historians, Kalhana was a Kashmiri. He was a learned Brahmin from an important family of the time. He was not merely a scholar interested in recording the early history of his country, but was also a poet. His narrative is in Sanskrit, written as a *kavya* in eight cantos, each canto being referred to as a *Taranga.* How apt this name is for each of the chapters of his narrative, as each *taranga* rises out of the ocean of events in the history of Kashmir like a new wave, peaks and eventually subsides to be absorbed into that vast body as it flows down through time!

> *"The interest of Kalhana's Rajatarangini for Indian history generally lies in the fact that it represents a class of Sanskrit composition which comes nearest to the chronicles of medieval Europe and of the Muhammadan East. Together with the later Kashmir chronicles which continue Kalhana's narrative, it is practically the sole extant specimen of this class".*[7]
>
> Aurel Stein

The *Rajatarangini* offers a narrative of the lives and times of various dynasties which ruled Kashmir from the earliest known periods—the end of the Mahabharata war—to Kalhana's own time. His work can be divided into three parts. The first part includes Books I–IV, commencing with the legendary events of the Mahabharata war. It derives largely from the legends that form the early history of Kashmir, including the *Nilamata Purana*, the *Mahatamyas* and other Puranic *Samhitas*. The second section, that is Books V and VI, covers the more 'historical' records of reigns taken from earlier written accounts arranged in a definite

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chronological sequence. The last section of his work—Books VII and VIII—is devoted to events that he has personally experienced or from narratives of living witnesses to various events. These are more objective in their observations, except where he expresses his own opinion of events or persons. They certainly lack the eulogical style of earlier authors, though none of the works to which he refers are available today for our reference.[7]

What is unique about the *Rajatarangini* is the fact that it is among the very few Sanskrit works which have preserved for us the history of a region, people or kings through such a vast expanse of time. From the time of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, through the historical narratives of Jonaraja, and followed by Srivara's (Jonaraja's pupil) *Jaina Rajatarangini* (1459–86), the focus is on the political history of Kashmir. The time span covered in all these chronicles spans the period of the original Hindu kings to the time when Kashmir came under the influence of Buddhism under Ashoka, and later Kanishka, who helped establish its roots firmly over several centuries, until it was finally eclipsed by a resurgence of Hinduism from the 6th Century. Jonaraja's chronicle of the 15th Century continues the historical narration to record the decline of Hindu dynasties and the take over of Kashmir by Muslim Sultans in the 14th Century. The last chronicle commenced by Prajya Bhatta and completed by his pupil Suka, takes us to a few years before the great Mughal Akbar annexed Kashmir in 1586. Perhaps no other part of India nor the world can boast of a recorded history that covers such a vast span of time, covering as many millennia. Needless to say, the transitions from Hinduism to Buddhism to Hinduism again, before the advent of Islam to Kashmir, left their impact

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on the social fabric of the corresponding periods, which in turn affected the social condition of the women of those times. Each of these transitions came in the wake of important historical events and changes.

There are problems in reconstructing history where there are no definitive facts to base such constructions, particularly where it comes to locating and recovering information on women of such times. This is the case with the first two sections of Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. These two sections are based on both oral as well as written legends and narrations from before his own time. Hence there is little scope for an objective view of those times and events, and even less scope for cross-checking events by referring to other written narratives belonging to those times.

Kalhana's work in this last section, while devoted largely to events to which he was witness in his own lifetime, includes those within living memory, for example from his father's lifetime. These, considering that his father Champaka was an important and respected member of King Harsha's court, give these narrations a stamp of authenticity. He gives us an accurate picture of the political and social conditions arising out of the historical events during that turbulent period. More significantly, he gives us the most detailed knowledge of the old topography of Kashmir—not merely the physical features of the Valley and the extent of its territories and influence, but the demographics, which includes the social classes representative of the locales and events that he writes about.[7]

Early in the last century, while writing about the *Rajatarangini*, S P Pandit states that though written more than 800 years back, it was "the only work hitherto discovered in India

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having any pretensions to be considered as a history". Jawahar Lal Nehru in his foreword to his brother-in-law, R S Pandit's translation of the ancient classic writes: "Such a book must necessarily have importance for every student of old Indian history and culture."

Kalhana's chronicle, especially in the cantos about the period closer to his own lifetime, is a vast and rich collection of information about Kashmir and its political, social and economic life. Through his writings we become spectators to a panorama of events being played out on that medieval royal stage—the gallantry and chivalry of those times; the loyalty and devastating treachery and treason; the love and hatred, and the resulting conflicts and intrigues that shaped the lives of those ancient kings and queens who ruled Kashmir. Every emotion that is manifested in human relationships finds a place in his writings, with the resulting profound effects not merely on their own lives, but more seriously, on their subjects with far-reaching historical consequences.

Kalhana wrote his chronicles during 1148–49. From his description of events which he witnessed in 1121, we can gather that he was no longer a young man when he got down to writing his chronicles. This also places his date of birth around the beginning of the 12th Century. This period was a turbulent time in Kashmir's history, following a rebellion against King Harsha (1089–1101). The king was subsequently overthrown by two of his relatives, Uccala and Sussala, from a branch of the Lohara dynasty, followed by his murder. The territory was divided between the brothers; the Kashmir Valley being ruled by Uccala, with his brother Sussala ruling the hill state of Lohara.

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Uccala managed to retain his throne until 1111, by playing off the powerful landed aristocracy, the Damaras, against each other. But during this time there were frequent internal conflicts and attempts at invasion by his brother. He was finally murdered by his own trusted officials who conspired against him.[7]

By allying himself with Gargachandra, a powerful land owner of Lohara, Sussala was able to secure his brother's long-coveted throne. His reign (1112–1128) of 16 years, was a long period of constant struggle against the Damaras and the pretender, Bhiksacara, who was Harsha's grandson. Bhiksacara managed to briefly depose Sussala and held nominal rule over Kashmir for a little over six months (1120–21). During this time of almost constant conflicts and warfare, the common people were driven to famine-like conditions. These conditions helped favour the return of Sussala to the throne after he defeated a Kashmiri force that had been sent against him at Lohara, where he had fled when his throne was usurped. The last four years of his reign were a period of uninterrupted civil wars. Srinagar was tortured with numerable sieges, and famine and fire continued to add to their sufferings. During this time, Sussala was able to hold on to his throne only with the support of his faithful followers from the lower hills and the Punjab. However, in 1128, he was murdered and was succeeded by his son Jaya Simha.[7]

In the following years, until 1143, internal strife continued to cripple Kashmir until the time of Kalhana's chronicles. Though his father had been a high official in Harsha's time, Kalhana himself never held office under any of the succeeding rulers of the new dynasty. His narratives show no indication about any of them being his royal patron. This is evident from his outspoken

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description of several of them, with the exception of his praise for the valour of Bhiksacara, and the considerate Bhoja, who drew his sympathetic comments.[7]

This troubled period in Kashmir's history gave Kalhana ample opportunities to observe his own people and comment truthfully on some characteristics of the population, particularly the lack of physical and moral courage of people in general, and the lower classes. He contrasts his observations with the bravery of the Rajaputras and other foreign mercenaries, including the northern Dards who appear to have been the loyal supporters of the Kashmir rulers of the times. Having witnessed in his time the intrigues and treachery of those in positions of power and trust, he praises the rare cases of loyalty and writes with bitterness about the traitors. He also notes the indifference of the general population to any change.

His writings reflect his low opinion of the Damaras. They are a class of people risen from the cultivators of the land whose power and its inappropriate use caused the fall of Harsha, and fuelled all the conflict and resulting disastrous consequences for the country and the people. Kalhana writes disparagingly about the coarseness and brutality with which these people dealt with others. This not only affected the cultivators of the lands they owned, but also the officials who had to deal with them, and the Brahmins who drew their maintenance from those lands.

Kalhana's writings which dealt with the greed and oppression of people by petty officials show how critical he was of the Kayasthas, most of whom were Brahmin by caste. He does not even spare the Brahmin priests or *purohits* of the principal shrines in the Valley, who were given generous endowments through

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the *agraharas* by the rulers. This gave them the power to play an important role in the internal politics of the courts to which they were attached. Kalhana exhibits scant respect for these "gods of the earth" and their interference in matters of the state. As a Brahmin of position and learning himself, he has a low opinion of their arrogance despite their ignorance. His remark:

> *"Kashmir is a land which delights in insurrections… in this country dancing women from the temples of the gods take a pleasure in upheavals against the king…"*

constitutes a sad commentary on the depths to which these self-professed "gods of the earth" could sink, even to the use of the dancing girls of temples to further their own ends.

The merchant class has not been spared either, when he writes of their cheating ways during those desperate times which must have provided them ample scope to exploit the needy for personal gain.[7]

In the context of his depiction of the Kashmiri Pandit men of the time, whether they be the priests or the *Karkuns* or Kayasthas and their preoccupation with survival or gain in those turbulent times, the condition of their women folk can be easily imagined. One can only resort to insightful conjecture regarding their situation, given their subservient position in a patriarchal society. Dominated by the patriarch on one hand and a society ravaged by warfare, siege and fire on the other, the Brahmin woman then, whether in the urban or rural locale, would have been in a particularly vulnerable position. Kalhana's narration in his last books brings it to the time of the last Hindu rulers in Kashmir.

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In the 14th Century, Kashmir finally passed into the hands of Muslim Sultans. But even before that happened, it is relevant to note that several far-reaching cross-cultural changes had already taken place. Kashmir in the time of Kalhana was a confluence of several cultures and influences. Since earlier times it was already the seat of the Indo-Aryan cultural structure, when Buddhism arrived there under Ashoka's rule. The Kushan influence brought in the cultures of Central Asia from where the Indo-Scythians came. Earlier Ashoka's empire had extended beyond the mountain barriers of the north and north-west, and brought in the Graeco-Roman and Iranian cultural influences. As part of the Ashoka's Empire, Kashmir was exposed to Buddhism, though it did not take root firmly under him. It was two centuries later under the Kushan kings, Kanishka in particular, that Buddhism flourished in Kashmir, and then spread its roots to Kashmir, and from there to Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan. Buddhism had the benefits of state patronage then.

It was during the reign of Emperor Ashoka that Madhyantika, the reformer, settled down in Kashmir on the banks of the Vitasta, with his group of 500 *arhants*. They were the ones who laid the foundations of the Mahayana School of Buddhism. The resulting conflicts between the Buddhist and the prevailing Vedic philosophies helped initiate the practice of dialogue and debate between scholars of both faiths. This tradition of discussions continues at Sadhavana (present day Harwan), a centre of learning that flourished under the renowned South Indian Buddhist scholar and teacher, Nagarjuna. This centre of learning drew scholars from not only among Brahmins of Kashmir but also those of other faiths, from as far away as Central Asia, Tibet

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and China. It is also said that the Fourth Buddhist Council was held in Kashmir, and that the resolutions of the Council rendered in 3,00,000 verses were engraved on copper plate and preserved, though lost eventually, and for which the search by archeologists continues even today. However, with the decline of the Kushans, Buddhism also declined in Kashmir. Shaivism was restored by the 6th Century and further reinforced after the 8th Century following Shankaracharya's visit to the area. The Trika Shaivite culture that followed resulted from a blending of the Vedantic and Buddhist philosophies.[8]

However, by the time Kalhana wrote his history, the old Indo-Aryan economic system was starting to fall apart not merely in Kashmir but elsewhere in India too. Under this changing situation this decay paved the way for the Muslim conquest of India. The Muslim rule in Kashmir, however, only came about two centuries later, and in a more peaceful manner.

It was during the same time period that Islam formed its roots in Arabia, and started to reach Central Asia, from where its influences trickled into Kashmir. The major impact of Islam on North India followed in the wake of the attacks by Mahmud of Ghazni, the first of which was in 1002. This brought him into conflict with Jaipal, the last Sahi ruler of Wahanad, who sought the help of the Kashmiri ruler of the time, Samgramraja. In 1015, an unforgiving Mahmud Ghazni returned to the gate to Kashmir, that is, the fort of Loharkot in the lower hills of South Kashmir. However, the fort proved impregnable despite the siege, and Mahmud of Ghazni returned frustrated but vengeful. This prompted a subsequent attack by him in 1021, which proved as unfruitful as his earlier attempt and forced him to withdraw.

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However, his attacks elsewhere in the subcontinent left many temples ravaged and looted.

What was significant following these attacks was that several rulers in and around Kashmir started to employ fierce Muslim warriors in their armies. Turks were employed in the armies of four of the Kashmiri Hindu kings of the time—Ananta (1028–63), Harsha (1089–1101), Bhiksacara (1120–21) and Jai Simha (1028–49). There is mention of Muslim women among the concubines, musicians and singers in the court of King Kalsa (1063–89).[9]

With the northern routes out of the Kashmir Valley connecting with the ancient trade route running from West Asia to China, Kashmir was the hub for trade and commerce and constant cultural exchange from both the West and East. With the traders came craftsmen and artisans, travellers, scholars and missionaries who helped shape Kashmir ethos for all future time. It was not the military might of would-be invaders of the time that impacted the Hindu Kashmiri kingdom, which was then slowly degenerating under its last rulers, but the more benign influences brought by commercial and cultural exchanges, the most important and lasting one of which was the humane Sufi Islamic way of life brought by its practitioners from Persia and Central Asia.

By the 14th Century, Kashmiri society—both the Buddhist and Brahminical social orders—was fast decaying and disintegrating under tyranny, bigotry and ritualistic idolatry of the Hindu rulers. Kashmir had suffered almost two centuries of internecine conflicts and exploitive practices of rulers and priests alike that had brought the state to the verge of economic collapse. The common man's lot was desperate and pitiful. This

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was the fertile soil that welcomed the advent of the Sufis and their benevolent doctrine.

An earlier Kashmiri ruler, Harsha, had in his time already come under the influence of Islam to the extent that he condemned idol worship and destroyed them in several temples before looting their wealth. There are historians who attribute his acts to his belief in and practice of Trika—the distinctive Kashmir Shaiva philosophy that had emerged, and discouraged idol worship. There are, however, other scholars who believe that his ravaging of temples was motivated by his need to replenish his imperial treasury.

This was the period in Kashmir when the Trika School of Shaivism had reached its peak and held sway in the region. Abhinavagupta, the great exponent of the Trika philosophy did not believe that the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* represented unchanging truth. He brought together elements of both Mahayana Buddhism and Advaita to propound the new philosophy which centres on *Parama Shiva*, which means the Supreme Entity. For the practitioner of Trika, the world and its manifestations are not mere *Maya* or illusion, but to be experienced, comprehended and known as causality, leading eventually to the realization of the Ultimate Reality.

The Chakreshwari Temple at Hari Parbat constitutes a concrete expression of this philosophy. This ancient temple that has, through the millennia, been the focus of reverence and worship of the Trika Shaivites of Srinagar and the Valley, is unique among the ancient shrines as there is no idol enshrined therein, except for a large rock representing the stone dropped by the mythical *Har*, a *myna*, into the prehistoric Satisar Lake that had engulfed the Valley originally.[8] The other belief associated with the temple

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pertains to the Shree Chakra carved on the surface of this rock representing the *Yantra*—a mystical geometric configuration attributed to Shankaracharya. Hari Parbat is at the centre of the later spiritual traditions of the Valley, Islam and Sikhism, with the shrines of Sheikh Hamzah Makhdoom as well as the Gurudwara Chatti Padshahi. This reflects the consonance between these three spiritual streams based on reverence of the one Supreme Entity.

When Islam came to Kashmir with the advent of Sufi saints and missionaries in the 14th Century, it had benefitted from the philosophies that existed in its transition from Arabia to Kashmir through what once was Babylonia, ancient Persia and Central Asia. While writing on Kashmiriyat, Riyaz Punjabi states that the Sufis saw no problem in accepting the unique fusion between their philosophy and Trika.

> *"The intermingling of Trika Shaivism with Islam resulted in the emergence of a new cult which came to be called the Rishi cult, a synonym of Bhakti. It was through the Rishis that Islam in its indigenous form became the popular faith of the people."*[8]

He goes on to quote Abul Fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari* which praises the Kashmiri *rishis*:

> *"The most respectable class in the country is that of the Rishis who, notwithstanding their need of freedom from the bonds of tradition and custom are true worshippers of God. They do not loosen the tongue of calumny against those not of their faith, nor beg, nor importune. They employ themselves in planting fruit trees and are generally a source of benefit to the people. They abstain themselves from flesh and meat, and do not marry."*[8]

Punjabi further states that by the reign of Jehangir, quoting the Mughal ruler, there were 2,000 *rishis* in the Valley.

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Before one examines the effect of all these historical events on the lives and culture of the Kashmiri people, it is important to know what their social condition was at the end of the Hindu dynasties and before Kashmir passed into the hands of the Muslim rulers. This would enable one to understand the position of women at all levels in that society.

The most ancient period of Kashmir history is what has come down to us from the *Nilamata Purana* through Kalhana's compilation of the earliest narratives. Vedic religion was the dominant influence on the lives of the Saraswat migrants into the Valley. However their old doctrines and ways of life of the plains were soon modified and adapted to their new environment. A certain degree of adaptation was required initially, as a concession to the indigenous Naga tribes already inhabiting it, with whom Rishi Kashyap, who was the leader of the Saraswats, had negotiated to allow for his people's permanent residence in the Valley. Prior to this, the migrants used to return to warmer areas at the onset of the severe winters which the Valley experiences.

The frontier region, north of the Gomal Pass, consists of uninterrupted mountains inhabited by tribes, whose mother tongue Pushto is related to the Kashmiri language. These tribes occupied the foothills of the Hindu Kush, including what were Chitral, Gilgit and Kafirstan.*

Severe winters saw the influx of these fierce northern tribes into the Valley. They descended from the higher reaches of their mountain habitats to escape the rigours of the extreme conditions

* These were part of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir under the Dogras prior to 1947. Today they have been incorporated into the Northern Areas of Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

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prevailing there. The *Nilamata Purana*, according to Kalhana, identifies these tribes as the Pishachas. They were involved in constant conflicts with the Nagas, the original inhabitants, and later with the Aryans, when they migrated into the Valley.

The Aryans had to make their compromises with these people as well. There were constant conflicts also over the very limited arable land available. The draining of the waters of the Satisar Lake, which covered the major area of the Valley, left more arable land for use by all the various tribes and people. It also left large water bodies, marshes and countless fresh water springs (the *Nags*) from which the original indigenous people derived their name. The Naga culture focused on the worship of snakes that they believed were the guardians of the springs that abounded in the Valley.

The legends and fables of the *Nilamata Purana* elucidate on the arrangements that the Aryans had to make with the Nagas. The theme of 'Heemal and Naga Rai' reflects the process of integration and assimilation of these two races. This found an echo in the incorporation of snakes and sacred serpents into Vedic theology and Kashmiri folklore. The serpents that surrounded Shiva even around his neck; *Samudra Manthan*, that is, the churning of the ocean by the gods on one side and the demons on the other, holding on to the king of serpents, Vasuki, who became the churning rope wound around Mount Meru or Mandaranchal as the churn; Vishnu lying on the serpent; and names of places such as Shesh Nag, Anant Nag and Nil Nag with sacred associations, all reflect the slow process of integration which continued through the ages.[2] Every new influx of, and its influence on people in the Valley, found a place in the ever-evolving Kashmiri ethos and

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culture, be it the early Buddhist, Shaivite, Islamic or later ones like that of the Sikhs, Dogras or Christians.

2.2 Changing Lifestyles and Impact on Women

The transition from their earlier nomadic culture to a settled agrarian way of life had an immediate effect on the way of life of the Brahmins, particularly the women folk of the patriarchy of these "gods of the earth" who reduced them to mere slaves to their men. By the onset of the Christian era, Manu, the law giver, had already categorically defined the status of the Brahmin woman in her family. From birth to death, she was subordinate and subservient to her father as a daughter, to her husband as his wife, and to her sons in her old age. Vedic society through the *Varna Vibhaga* had structured society into different castes, clearly demarcating the divisions and delineating their role and positions in relationship to those of the two highest castes, namely, Brahmins and Kshatriyas. The latter were the warriors and the class from which the early Hindu kings and rulers were drawn.

In the earliest period of Hindu rule, the position and status of women belonging to these two highest castes were far superior to those of the women of the lower castes and classes. This was by virtue of the power and status of the men of both these castes. In the caste hierarchy, the Brahmins stood over all the others as they were looked upon as the intermediaries between the gods and ordinary humans. Their learning and mastery of the *Vedas* and Vedic rituals associated with the rites of passage of the lower castes made them indispensable to the other castes, as *purohits*, and as counsellors to the king. The ruler made valuable

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endowments to the Brahmins by way of *agraharas*. Also, since there was no dearth of *tirthas* or holy sites in the Valley associated with ancient myths and legends, the Mahatmyas came up at each site which required the services of Brahmin priests. In fact, the priests at such sites organized themselves into powerful and monopolistic unions, something which is practised to this day. The priests, instead of confining themselves to religious and spiritual pursuits, used their powerful bases to interfere in secular affairs of the state. The Raj Guru—the king's counsellor—did not hesitate to go beyond the bounds of his spiritual role.

It was natural, therefore, that the women of such powerful Brahmin families were in privileged position, as compared to the lesser females of the other castes. Even the wives of the Kayasthas—the lesser or petty officials of the king's court and the *gram kayasthas* attached to the *agraharas* and landholdings of the aristocracy—held a better status as compared to other women folk of the Vaishya or Shudra castes. For one thing, Brahmin women of that time had the benefit of classical Sanskrit education. They spoke Sanskrit or Brahmini, the everyday version of the classic language, irrespective of the level to which they belonged. They were well versed in Vedic knowledge and mantras, and participated with equality with their spouses in religious ceremonies where their presence by the side of their husbands was mandatory. They were known to participate in theological and philosophical debates and discussions. The most cited example is of the debate between Shankaracharya and Mandana Misra's wife, Ubhaya Bharati, who resumed the discussion when the great Southern teacher requested a hiatus after his debate with her husband, and finally had to concede defeat to her.[2]

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Queens and consorts of Hindu rulers too, in keeping with the status of their husbands, enjoyed privileged positions of equality with them. As practised elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent of that time, during the coronation and *abhishek* of the ruler, the queen was an equal participant as she was in the affairs of the court where she sat by the ruler's side. Her participation in and knowledge of the governance of the country prepared her for any dire consequence of the king's early death, when she might be required to act as a regent for a minor or feeble heir. She had her own treasury and funds at her disposal, as is evidenced by the number of early Kashmiri queens who made rich endowments to schools, temples and monasteries, not merely in ancient times, but down to the medieval period before the Muslim dynasties took over after the fall of the Hindu rulers.[2]

Not merely were these queens capable of ruling the country, but coming as the majority of them did, from families with a martial tradition, quite often they were well trained in the martial arts and did not hesitate to join their troops in battle.[1]

Bazaz, in writing of the garments worn by those early women warriors, states:

> *"On battlefield the Kashmiri women wore red-trousered uniforms like other Kashmiri soldiers in arms..."*
>
> *"The trousers were probably first introduced by the Kushans as they were in vogue among the ruling classes under them..."*

And he goes on to state that:

> *"...wearing of shirts and trousers seems to have become common in medieval times in the Valley as in Gandhara (North-Western Frontier and East Afghanistan)."*

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These practices very clearly were in sharp contrast with those prevalent in the rest of India at that time.[1]

As for the women of the other lower castes, though those of wealthier trading families had the benefit of acquiring some education, it is doubtful whether the labouring classes were at all literate, including the men.

The one class of women in those ancient and medieval times who did have the privilege of a liberal education in the letters and fine arts were the temple dancers and courtesans as in most early cultures, since their role in life was to pander to the desires of their rich and powerful patrons from the highest levels of society. It is doubtful however, that they were ever from the two highest castes. But even for these two highest classes of women, who in the earliest periods enjoyed singularly privileged positions, later periods in Kashmiri society were to see Brahmin women being subjected to a less liberal treatment. This was around the time of the onset of the Christian era and in the wake of the *Manu Smritis*; when knowledge of the scriptures was denied to them, as also access to higher education. In the subordinate role assigned to her by Manu, she was reduced to being just a household drudge catering to the welfare of the menfolk who enjoyed the fruits of her labour.

The lot of the women of the lowest classes was the least envied. They were the ones who worked not only within the household, but in case of the peasant class, they assisted their men in all the agricultural operations throughout the growing season. Again, where Brahmins were land owners, the peasants who toiled on their lands were of the lower classes.

What we learn from Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is that the degeneration and decay of the Hindu dynasties appear to have

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commenced after the death of Avantivarman, one of the greatest of the Hindu rulers, in 833 AD. The ensuing period, right up to the final collapse of Hindu dynasties in the 14th Century, was characterized by short reigns, rebellions, conspiracies and assassinations. These arose invariably out of attempts to gain power and revenues. There were also differences between various racially-divided communities—the Damaras, Ekangas, Tantrins and Lavanyas.[2]

The dominating role of the rulers and priests did not help to ease the unrest either, rather it only served to aggravate the general sense of discontent on the part of the lower castes and poorest sections. The oppressive, exploitive structures of the state were driving the common man to despair. The cultivators were at the mercy of the *gram kayasthas* responsible for collecting the revenues from the *agraharas*.

At every level of the caste hierarchy, there were deep divisions and raging conflicts. Even before a ruler came to throne, there were struggles for succession amongst his closest relatives culminating in conspiracies usually ending with murder or assassinations.[2]

Among the nobles and aristocracy in the royal courts, there were struggles for power between the ministers and commanders of the armed forces leading to more chaos and uncertainty, which resulted in the ultimate demoralizing of the common man, who emerged as the chief victim of these circumstances. Women in turn must have borne the main brunt of these situations, especially those of the lower classes who were exploited in times of both peace and war.[2]

The lot of the peasant was the worst. It was his effort that produced the harvest during the short growing season that the

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Valley usually experiences. With the bulk of the crop going to the landowners—the powerful Damaras and the equally powerful Brahmins who owned the rest of the arable land—the peasant's share of the yield was almost negligible. When wars and internecine conflicts disrupted agricultural operations, the results were famine-like conditions where the cultivator was the worst off of the classes. In times of relative peace, the lavish lifestyles and spendthrift ways of the wealthy rulers and upper classes resulted in economic depression.[2]

Among the Brahmins there were divisions within the elite. The Raj Purohits and the Raj Gurus looked down on ordinary priests, the Kayasthas and the ordinary people of their community. The Brahmins controlling the *agraharas* were the most powerful. The Kayasthas who were petty officials were envious of the more powerful in the community, resulting in their intrigues with the rulers to cut these landowners down to size by confiscating their rich landholdings and by imposing taxes on them. It is significant that while Brahmins were exempt from taxes, the peasants had to pay disproportionately high taxes, reducing them to dire poverty.[2]

2.3 Kashmir under Foreign Rule

It should be noted that between the earliest Hindu period and the later one preceding the Muslim rule in Kashmir, there had been several centuries when Kashmir was largely Buddhist under the Mauryas and the Kushans. During this period, large numbers of people belonging to the lower classes converted to Buddhism, to escape from the oppressive and exploitive Hindu

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caste structure, to the more humane egalitarian casteless and classless new social structure. The Brahmin community saw no need to do so, since they still held a dominant position in the residual Hindu community.

Under the Buddhist dispensation, women gained greater freedom especially in the areas of intellectual pursuits. However, as ascetics in the Sangha, Brahmin women gradually lost much of their earlier freedom, erudition and status in their own community. With the decline of Buddhism and with the resurgence of Hinduism from the 6th Century onwards, there was a brief improvement in the status of Brahmin womanhood with the rise of the Trika School of Shaivite philosophy. A tantric sect that introduced the worship of female deities and an order of female ascetics, Pandit women briefly regained some importance and some of their lost status.

However, there is no evidence of whether all classes of the Pandit society were able to benefit from these gains. The women of the highest orders were certainly the beneficiaries and their fame spread beyond the borders of Kashmir. Bilhana, an 11th Century Kashmiri poet laureate at the court of Kalyan in the Deccan, writes not only about the beauty of the Kashmiri women but of their high intellectual achievements. However, from this period, no written materials or treatises by Kashmiri women have survived.

From these heights, the Kashmiri Pandit women plunged to a nadir with the advent of the Muslim dynasties under the Sultans, the Mughals and the later Afghan governors of Kashmir. Though among these rulers there were the occasional benevolent and tolerant rulers like Zain-ul-abidin ('Bad Shah') and Akbar and

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Jehangir, there were also several bigoted ones like Sikander 'But Shikan' who persecuted and massacred their Hindu subjects and destroyed Hindu temples, causing survivors to flee Kashmir.

However, there were some benefits also from the liberal and tolerant Muslim rulers. It had been the custom under earlier Hindu rulers for the upper class women to practise Sati. Among the ruling class, it was expected that the wife and other consorts of the dead man would mount his funeral pyre and perish in its flames. It was under these liberal Muslim rulers that Hindu women were saved from this practice, though it was not to be totally discontinued until many centuries later.[2]

The earliest Islamic influences in Kashmir go back to 713 AD, when the first attempts to reach southern Kashmir were made by Mohammad bin Qasim when he led an expedition to conquer Kashmir after he had consolidated his position in Sind. However, the recall of his forces to Damascus resulted in his purpose being thwarted.

Between 724–753 AD Caliph Walid's forces conquered Kabul and Turkistan. Gilgit was surrendered by the Chinese in 751 AD. Lalitaditya of Kashmir foiled an attempt by Caliph Hesham to conquer Kashmir. During the time of Caliph Mansur, there was another failed attempt to enter Kashmir. Mahmud Ghazni's failed attempts were to come much later.[9]

It therefore becomes evident that unlike much of the adjoining territories, Islam did not come to Kashmir through conquest by Islamic forces. Rather in 1320, the rejection by the Brahmin community of his request by the Ladakhi adventurer, Rinchen Shah (who usurped the throne in the reign of the last Hindu ruler) to convert to Hinduism, paved the way for his

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conversion to Islam by the Sufi missionaries who welcomed him to their fold. He became the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir, taking the title of Sultan Sadr-ud-din. He had a short reign of three years (1320–23) during which time Islam received royal patronage and resulted in the construction of a mosque and a hospice for the new converts in Srinagar. His death saw a brief revival of Hindu rule under Kota Rani, one of the several outstanding women of medieval times. With her life and death in 1339, was sounded the death knell of the ancient Hindu dynasties.

With the decline of the Hindu dynasties in Kashmir, the Muslim influence in neighbouring areas had started to be felt. Even by the end of the 13th Century, there were pockets in Kashmir where there were Muslim colonies, for these find mention in the travelogues of Marco Polo. The death blow to Hindu dynasty came in 1319 AD during the reign of King Sahadeva, who had ascended the throne in 1300 AD. When he came to the throne, Kashmir had seen nearly 300 years of rulers who were dissolute spendthrifts, bringing the country and the dynasty to the verge of ruin. This paved the way for foreigners to exploit the situation. At this time, there were two men who played a crucial role in the history of Kashmir; one of them was Rinchen, a Ladakhi prince, and the other was Shah Mir, a Muslim from Punjab (there are some who say he came from Reasi, and others who put his origins in Swat—a frontier region). However, before they could step on to the political scene, Kashmir was invaded by a Tartar adventurer Zulqadar Khan–Dulcha, who headed a huge army of 60,000 horsemen bringing death and destruction throughout the Valley. The Valley

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was looted and pillaged by him. King Sahadeva fled in terror before him, though his prime minister Ramachandra took refuge in the fort at Gagangir at the foot of Zojila. Nothing is known or recorded of the fate of Sahadev thereafter.[2]

Dulcha himself unable to feed his vast army in the ravaged land attempted to leave the country but fell prey to a severe snowstorm in one of the most difficult and treacherous passes out of the Valley. Both he and his army perished there. With his passing, and the disappearance of Sahadeva, there were three candidates for kingship—Ramachandra, the prime minister; Rinchen, the Ladakhi prince heading a dependable force of his countrymen who had arrived at the opportune moment; and Shah Mir, who had been in Sahadeva's employ in his administration and had become well-versed with the affairs of state. He was a shrewd politician and had gained some supporters in political circles.

The dire hunger of ascension incited Rinchen to attack Ramachandra, first by subterfuge and then a direct attack by sending an advance party of his followers as traders to the fort at Gagangir. These deceiving traders threw open the gates of the fort for the force that was waiting outside. In the clash which ensued, Ramachandra was killed and his family captured, including Kota Rani. There is considerable speculation whether she was Ramachandra's wife or daughter, or Sahadeva's wife who had taken shelter in the fort with the prime minister during Dulcha's invasion when her husband fled the scene. Jonaraja, the historian, does not give a clear picture about this. What is known is that she was young and apparently a realist, who saw in Rinchen a means of restoring peace in Kashmir, when she

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made peace with him after her capture, and accepted his offer of marriage. He himself must have seen his alliance with her as a means to consolidate his position on the throne that he had usurped. The Buddhist Rinchen realized that he would better his position by converting to Shaivite Hindu faith and approached the Brahmin priests for that purpose. The arrogant, bigoted priests turned down his request. This piloted him to the Sufis led by Bulbul Shah, who had already impressed him deeply with their humane form of Islam. He was welcomed into that faith and assumed the Muslim name of Sadr-ud-din, thus becoming the first foreign, non-Hindu ruler of Kashmir. Kota Rani as his queen probably never embraced Islam.[2]

In the three years that Sadr-ud-din ruled Kashmir (1320–1323) until his death at the hands of conspirators, Kota Rani assisted him ably in ruling the country. She did not even object to his religious observances or patronage of his new religion when he built the first mosque (*khanqah*) in Srinagar for his preceptor, Bulbul Shah. Kota had a son by Rinchen named Haidar, who was raised as a Muslim. The son was given to the charge of Shah Mir, who still held office in the court. It was during this time that more than ten thousand Kashmiris converted to Islam, drawn to it by the benevolence of the Sufis.

On the death of Sadr-ud-din, Kota, instead of putting the minor Haidar on the throne, saw her husband's death as an opportunity to restore the earlier-lost Hindu dynasty. Though Sahadeva had disappeared, his brother, Udayanadeva, had survived Dulcha's onslaught by taking refuge in Gandhara. He was no doubt behind the conspiracy to eliminate Sadr-ud-din. Yet Kota Rani invited Udayanadeva, whom she nominated to

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ascend the throne. She also married him in an attempt to secure his position on the throne.

However, she had reckoned without the presence of Shah Mir, who neither approved her nomination, nor her marriage to the new ruler. Unable to muster the support that he needed to overthrow the new ruler, especially with the support and loyalty of the courtiers to Kota, he merely bided his time while acknowledging Udayanadeva as sovereign. Though he ruled for 15 years, he failed to be a good ruler, with the result that the burden of governance fell on Kota Rani's shoulders, as she was the virtual ruler.

It was in 1330 AD that Kashmir faced the threat of yet another invasion by yet another adventurer named Achala, who came from south and threatened to destroy the country with his armed force. A timid king that he was, Udayanadeva fled to Ladakh, leaving Kota Rani behind to defend the country. She managed to rally her countrymen behind her and then negotiated with the intruder so shrewdly that she forced him to sue for peace, and he withdrew from the Valley.[2]

While the threat of impending invasion lasted, Shah Mir, being the shrewd politician he was, placed his services at the disposal of the queen, and won the people's loyalty by putting their interest and that of the country before any other. With the departure of Achala, Udayanadeva returned from Ladakh and begged forgiveness of Kota Rani, who with misplaced kindness welcomed him, and restored the throne to him. No doubt, her desire to restore the Hindu dynasty to Kashmir prevailed over her better judgment in the matter. However, not all her courtiers or councillors went along with her decision, least of all, Shah Mir.

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Through his loyal services to earlier rulers, he had made a place for himself in the esteem of the Kashmiri people. As a courtier of long standing, he had acquired considerable power, wealth and influence with the armed forces. He had also made Kashmir less vulnerable to outside attacks by building forts at strategic sites. His matrimonial alliances with local nobility and feudal lords brought him their loyalty, and he made political alliances with wealthy land owners and petty chieftains in the districts.

His next move was to belittle and weaken the queen by drawing attention to the incompetence of the king, and urging the cause of Haidar as the legitimate heir to the throne. He instigated a feudal vassal to disobey the orders of the queen, in response to which she sought to punish him by personally leading a force against him. It was a misadventure which led to her being trapped and imprisoned. She was fortunate to be rescued from that situation by her loyal minister Kumarabhatta.[2]

Kota Rani had had a son, Bhola Rattan, by King Udayanadeva and his upbringing had been entrusted to another courtier Bhikshana Bhatta, a rival of Shah Mir. When Udayanadeva died in 1339 AD, Kota Rani, setting aside the claims of both Haidar and Bhola Rattan to the throne, assumed the throne herself. She followed this by appointing Bhikshana Bhatta as prime minister instead of Shah Mir. This further ired Shah Mir, who gave vent to his resentment by slaying Bhikshana Bhatta with a dagger. The infuriated queen demanded his surrender, but to her chagrin found that many of her courtiers were hand in glove with him when she wanted to take him into custody. However, she was dissuaded by those who had switched their loyalties to him. Kota had to give in to their advice. This cleared the way for Shah Mir, who had come to the Valley 27 years earlier to

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seek employment in the Kashmir court to take over the reins of government from Kota Rani.[2]

When he took over the control of Kashmir, Kota was well past middle age and he was an old man, but when he offered to marry her, no doubt, to strengthen his position as ruler, she accepted. It is believed that they shared their marital bed for only night, at the end of which, Shah Mir had the queen arrested in the morning. Overcome with grief, the queen committed suicide the same year (1339), having been his consort for just five months.

Jonaraja in his chronicle of those times bestows high praise on Kota Rani when he states :

> *"As the canal nourishes cultivated fields with water, so did the Queen nourish the people by bestowing much wealth on them. She was to the kingdom what the moon is to the blue lotus; and to the enemy she was what the luminary is to the white lotus."*[2]

She stands out as an outstanding figure in the history of medieval Kashmir, courageous in the face of overwhelming odds, with a deep commitment to her people, her country and her Hindu dynastic roots putting aside her personal interests to preserve all those. For almost a decade, she held the reins of government and brought Kashmir to a time of comparative peace and prosperity after generations of misrule by her predecessors. With her death ended the millennia-old Hindu and Buddhist dynasties of Kashmir and the advent of Muslim rule under the foreign-born Sultans, and those who would follow them, which were to have a long-lasting effect on the culture of Kashmir.

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THREE

Advent of Islam

"History responds to a variety of needs, from greater understanding of ourselves and our world to answers about what to do. For many human beings, an interest in the past starts with themselves. That is in part a result of our own biology. We have a beginning and an ending, and in between lies our own story."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), p 5

"History, if it is used with care; can present us with alternatives, help us to form the questions we need to ask of the present, and warn us about what might go wrong."

Margaret MacMillan, *ibid*, p 172

Following the takeover of Kashmir's throne by Shah Mir, the suicide of Kota Rani did not lead to any serious repercussions. There had been a long disenchantment with the misrule of the Hindu rulers of the common people to whom Islam, as practised by the Sufis, brought relief to their sorry condition. With Rinchen having converted to Islam and royal patronage extended to Muslims, the new converts found themselves more at ease and in a position of privilege, thus encouraging more to embrace Islam.

Sultan Shah Mir, with his long experience in the earlier Kashmir rulers' courts, also realized the need to gain the support of his Hindu subjects, and to that end, he befriended them and

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patronized them. He also won them over with measures that made them feel more secure under Muslim rule. With the need to strengthen his own position, and that of his successors, he also entered into matrimonial alliances with the Hindu nobility. Though he did not actively work for the spread of Islam in his time, the consolidation of the Muslim Sultanate brought in its wake a flood of Sufi missionaries to Kashmir. The first were the followers of Sayyid Ali Hamdani during the reign of Shehab-ud-din (1354–1373), including his close disciples and relations. They were sent to report back to him on further prospects for the spread of Islam in the Valley. With the Sultan himself as a disciple, Sayyid Taj-al-din and his son Hasan settled down in Srinagar, opened *maktabs* and constructed a *khanqah* and laid out a graveyard.[10]

Two others, Sayyid Hussain Simnani and his nephew Sayyid Haider, moved to Kulgam which was an endowment to them from the Sultan himself. A *khanqah* was set up there for the preaching of Islam. With their austere ways of life, their caring and loving natures, and their commitment to bettering the lot of the suffering common people, irrespective of caste or creed, they won their love and respect, resulting in growing numbers converting to the new faith.

The greatest change came following the arrival in 1384 with 700 disciples of the Sufi master Sayyid Ali Hamdani. He was a descendent of the Prophet, born in Hamdan, Persia, into an aristocratic family. He was a scholar and writer of merit, a poet and philosopher, and a traveller who was at the peak of his spiritual development. He had been initiated at an early age into the Qubravi order by Sheikh Mahmood Mazdakani and went through a vigorous discipline of Sufi practice that encouraged humility, austerity, truthfulness, love and service to

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humanity, and treating all men alike. It took only six years for his spirituality to unfold. The Sufi tradition also requires extensive travel as a part of their training, enabling one to seek knowledge by interacting with men of peace, and to undertake pilgrimages to pursue the mission of spreading the faith.[11]

Hamdani started his mission at the age of 20 and travelled for 41 years during the course of which he interacted with 1,400 Sufis and scholars. On his return to Hamdan in 1354, he spent the next 18 years in initiation and guidance of spiritual seekers. His fame spread through Central Asia and beyond.

When he arrived in Kashmir, in the 50 years of Muslim rule that had already taken place, though there had been numerous conversions, the Muslim community was still a small minority that lived a Hindu way of life continuing the practices of the old religion. Hamdani was appalled at the state of affairs. He realized that this was largely because the new converts had not been instructed in how to live life according to the *Shariah*.[10]

In order to remedy that lack, he sent out his followers to the ends of the Valley to demonstrate through their own examples, the superiority of the new religion over the exploitive, rigid structures that the Brahmins had imposed on the lower orders of their caste system. The Sufis like Hamdani himself lived simple, self-disciplined, chaste and unselfish lives as per the *Shariah* which they preached, wherever they lived among the common masses.

Though Sayyid Ali Hamdani lived in Srinagar himself, he kept in constant touch with his disciples by travelling widely in southern Kashmir. But his main concern was to instruct and guide the Sultan himself, and he was able to wean him from the old ways. He became a model of Islam for his people. His only reluctance was to enforce *Shariah* in matters of state.

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The next goal of the Sufi master was to convert the nobility and important politicians and religious leaders of the city. He was in Kashmir only for a period of one year, but in that time he succeeded in laying a strong foundation of Islam in the Valley. He even persuaded the head priest of the Kali temple to embrace Islam along with thousands of his followers. When he left Kashmir, he left his disciples behind to consolidate the foundation that he had laid. They changed Hindu Kashmir into a Muslim state.[10]

His son, Mir Mohammad Hamdani, followed his father's footsteps and arrived in Kashmir in 1393 with 300 disciples and stayed on for 22 years. His first targets were Sultan Sikander (1389–1413), his prime minister Suha Bhatta, and other nobles. He also persuaded the Sultan to enforce *Shariah* and impose *Jazia* on Brahmins. These were coercive measures which had not been used by the previous Muslim rulers. The new converts, particularly the prime minister, in the fanaticism typical of new converts ensured the true Islamization of the populace by forced conversions on the pain of death. Those who could flee took the opportunity and fled out of the Valley and those who could not faced two choices—conversion or death. Temples were destroyed and desecrated, earning for the ruler the sobriquet of 'But Shikan'. Ancient temples at Martand, Chakradhara Tripureshwari, Avantipora and Paraspora fell to the rage of the ruler. The riches and materials collected from the destroyed temples were later used in the construction of the Jama Masjid in Srinagar, and the embankments of the city.

This period of the history of early Islamization of Kashmir was a blot on the earlier peaceful advent of Islam to the Valley when the converts accepted the new faith voluntarily finding

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hope and a better life in it. Though Sikander 'But Shikan' died an early death, aged thirty two, the persecutions and forcible conversions continued during the reign of his son Ali Shah also. It was not until his brief reign which ended in 1420, that there was a period of relief and peace under Zain-ul-abidin, who succeeded his older brother. His long reign from 1420 to 1470 AD was a golden period in the pages of the Islamic history of Kashmir. A benevolent, tolerant ruler, he is remembered through history as 'Bad Shah', the great ruler. He abrogated the harsh laws imposed by his father against the Hindus and declared that the *Shariah* would not be imposed on the Hindus, who would be governed by their own personal laws.

Temples, earlier destroyed, were repaired and rebuilt by him. He persuaded the Brahmins who had fled Kashmir to return home, ensuring freedom of worship to all; going to the extent of allowing those who had been forcibly converted to return to their faith. *Pathshalas* and *Vidyalayas* were opened for the study of Sanskrit and the scriptures. Financial aid was given to those who wanted to proceed to Benaras or the South for higher studies. There was equal patronage to Hindus and Muslims. Though he himself was a devout Muslim, he studied the Sanskrit scriptures and visited the ancient *tirthas*.

His reign saw the development of the Valley when he invited architects, engineers, craftsmen and artisans to bring in the latest developments in order to improve the quality of life of his people. His invitation brought enlightened scholars in religion, philosophy, jurisprudence, literature, poetry and the fine arts to his court bringing the best eclectic milieu to his country. What had started with the first wave of Sufi missionaries to Kashmir—the peaceful, harmonious coexistence

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and melding of the two cultures—was brought to fruition under this great ruler.

It was during his time that this cultural synthesis gave rise to the Rishi Movement under Sheikh Noor-ud-din (1378–1442). This movement was unique to Kashmir and the world of Islam. The Sufis had played a significant role in the spread of their benign form of Islam through a humane approach to the oppressed Hindu population of Kashmir. Buddhism had earlier offered a similar hope of relief to those castes which were crushed and exploited by the Brahmins. In both instances, the down-trodden classes rushed to embrace the new egalitarian religions. Buddhism left a deep and abiding impression on the Kashmir psyche even after the resurgence of Hinduism, after its decline and disappearance from Kashmir. A deep-rooted tolerance of other faiths was the bedrock of Sufism and its manifestation in the Rishi Movement attracted both communities to it.

Sheikh Noor-ud-din, whose original name was Nand, was the grandson of the Hindu king of Kishtwar who had been killed in civil strife there, following which the family moved to Kashmir. His father was converted to Islam after his meeting Sayyid Hussain Simnani. From his early childhood, Noor-ud-din had been averse to the rituals of Islam, and the teachings of the *mullahs* in the *maktabs*. He refused to attend the school and preferred to spend long hours alone and in contemplation, much to the annoyance of his family and peers. After his father's death, poverty drove his brothers to theft but Noor-ud-din refused to join them.[10]

Despite his mother's efforts to get him to accept the responsibilities of family life by earning a living as an apprentice to a weaver, he took no interest in either his work or his growing

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family and made no contribution to the family's income. He was caught up in a mental and spiritual dilemma in his search for the Supreme Truth and Reality.

He was nearing thirty when he came under the influence of Lalleshwari, the wandering ascetic who had rebelled against her own family in her search for truth. A Hindu Shaivite, she had—in her revolt against the years of torment and abuse by her mother-in-law and her husband—finally abandoned both her marital and natal families, and set out alone on her quest. She decried the worship of idols, rituals and dogma and the orthodoxy and hypocrisy of the Hindu faith of her time. She had no use for the traditional gender role in the Kashmiri patriarchal family which prevented her as a woman to have access to the secret doctrines and practices that would lead her to her ultimate goal of oneness with the Supreme Reality.

It was not an easy decision for her to make as a woman, nor was it easy for her to take the path of detachment from material reality in order to achieve that enlightened state of transcendence where all else is reduced to mere transitory experiences to be discarded as illusions. There was much in common between this approach to life and living, and the Sufi way of life. As he was initiated by Lalleshwari ('Lal Ded' to later generations of both Muslims and Hindus) into the mysteries of the secret doctrines that she had discovered through her austere practices, he found the peace that he had sought over the years.

He withdrew from his world into a cave in the vicinity of his village, subsisting initially on wild vegetables, and later on a single cup of milk each day, and eventually only on water. Out of these austere practices and contemplation, he emerged as the

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greatest sage of his times. Lalla had in her time expressed her attained wisdom in the language of the common people of the time that is Kashmiri, which had evolved over centuries from Sanskrit—the original language of the "gods of the earth". She had expressed them in *Vaakhs*—profound truths in the images of the everyday world of the common man, so that she could share with them her attained wisdom, unlike the secret doctrines of her abandoned world that were the exclusive domain of only those men initiated into it. Noor-ud-din drew on the wealth of those *Vaakhs* to preach his faith of humanism which transformed Kashmiri culture and society through succeeding ages even to recent times. Sheikh Noor-ud-din died in 1442, mourned by a multitude of followers led by Sultan Zain-ul-abidin himself. He was buried in a tomb at Chrar, the village where he died, 32 kms from Srinagar. This *ziarat* attracted thousands of pilgrims of all religions through all time after him, until its recent destruction in an armed encounter between terrorists from across the border and security forces.

The legacy of 'Nund Rishi', as he came to be known, arising out the blending of various local traditions and religious philosophies had an enduring social impact on Kashmir life and culture even until recent times, reflected in its unique composite culture. Recent events of 1989–90 were a concerted effort by agents of radical Islam to destroy that ancient legacy.

3.1 Shah Mir Dynasty

Shah Mir could be called the real founder of the Muslim Sultanate in Kashmir, though Sadr-ud-din could be regarded as the first of the Kashmiri Muslim rulers of foreign birth. Immediately on

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accession to the throne, Shah Mir assumed the title of Shams-ud-din and had coins struck to mark the event. Though he came to the throne by dubious means, and his rise to power did not predict a good reign, his actual reign (1339–1342) proved to be a benevolent one for his people. He did away with many of the oppressive taxes that had been levied on the people by earlier rulers and the cruel methods of extortion. The land revenue was fixed at one-sixth of the total quantum of produce.[10]

To neutralize those sections of the population like the Lavanyas, who had earlier been a constant source of trouble for the previous rulers, he patronized the Magres, a local family, and the Chaks, who had migrated to Kashmir from the Dard region. His army officers were now largely drawn from these two families, with Lanker Chak heading the army as commander-in-chief.

Towards the end of his reign, a minor uprising by a class of officials known as the Rajasthaniyas was put down. Following this, as he was already an old man, he sought to retire from rulership and handed over the reins of government to his sons, Jamshed and Ali Sher. He died soon after in 1342, and was buried at Sumbal near Anderkot.

Jamshed had a gentle nature, and was a very trusting person. He usually consulted his brother on all matters of governance. Ali Sher taking advantage of his brother's trust in him, gradually assumed greater powers, arousing his brother's suspicions of his intent. Ali Sher then revolted openly, and after some resistance assumed the throne. Jamshed wandered about in the Valley for over a year and died in 1345. In his short reign of one year, he built the bridge over the Jhelum at Sopore, and also several *sarais* for the convenience of travellers.

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Ali Sher, who ascended his deposed brother's throne, took the title of Ala-ud-din. His rule (1343–54) was a time of peace and stability in the Valley. He moved his seat from Anderkot to Alaudinpur. He, like his brother, built a *sarai* for travellers at Budhagir, now a locality near Ali Kadal in Srinagar. He made his mark as a social reformer. He put into place a law which prevented a childless widow of questionable morals from receiving any share of her late husband's property.

He ensured that all the towns and cities which had been depopulated in earlier times due to wars and invasions were repopulated. Though there were famine-like conditions in the early years of his reign, he extended help to the affected people to tide them over the period. The Lavanyas tried to disturb the peace but were captured and severely punished. He died in the year 1354 and was buried in his capital.

He was succeeded by his son Shirasmak, who assumed the title of Shehab-ud-din, in the same year. He found his place in history as a great conqueror who subjugated territories lying to the north, north-west and south of Kashmir. But before he set out on his conquests, he consolidated his position at home. Many of the feudal chiefs had taken advantage of the earlier time of upheavals in the last days of Hindu rule and had asserted their independence. Though some had been subdued by Shah Mir and his sons, there were some who still resisted. Shehab-ud-din, launched a campaign against them, and established order in the kingdom. Having done so, he embarked as the head of his forces to conquer new territories.

Jonaraja's chronicles tell us that he first led a campaign against the territories lying between the Indus and the Oxus river in

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Central Asia to the north, and subdued them. As a result, territories as far south as the Sindhu (Indus), the hill tribes of Jammu, the regions of the Upper Indus and Gandhara bowed down to his authority. He then proceeded to Ghazni, and sacked Purasvira (Peshawar) and went beyond as far as the foothills of the Hindu Kush. From there, he returned to Kashmir, and then proceeded south again, as far as the Sutlej, where he confronted a Mongol chief who was returning after looting Delhi. The ruler of Nagarkot was the next to surrender to him. He then attempted a conquest of Ladakh from which he returned after merely crossing the Indus.

However, his most significant move was against Feroz Shah Tughlaq of Delhi. The battle was fought on the banks of the Sutlej but neither could claim a victory. In the peace that was concluded, Feroz Shah Tughlaq recognized Shehab-ud-din's suzerainty over the entire territory from Sirhind to Kashmir. There were some mutual matrimonial alliances. There, however, remain some doubts on the veracity of reports on some of his conquests. Also, he himself could not have directly ruled such a vast territory, and these may have reverted to their original rulers.

He also left his mark as an able administrator, a tolerant ruler of all his subjects, but one who did not spare law breakers. In 1360, when a devastating flood practically destroyed the whole of Srinagar, he not only helped those affected, but also ensured prevention of a future recurrence by building a new town at a higher level near Hari Parbat named Lakshminagar after his wife, the queen.

However, there were some measures that were unpopular with the people, for instance, the tax called *Baj*. Another was

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his demand from *hanjis* or boatmen of free service from them, of seven days a month.[10]

His final years saw him being manipulated by a niece of his wife to whose charms he fell prey. She was able to persuade him to send his queen and two sons into exile. When separation from them began to tell on him, he sent for his older son Hasan Khan who rushed to him, but the Sultan passed away before he could arrive.

Shehab-ud-din's reign was outstanding, both from the point of view of good governance, ensuring peace in the land, and also from the political and military point of view. It was the most glorious time of the Muslim Sultanate of Kashmir.

He was succeeded by his brother Hindal, who assumed the title of Qutb-ud-din. His reign (1373–89) was beset by the revolt of the Loharas, and his own nephew Hasan Khan. The only notable event in his reign was the visit of Sayyid Ali Hamdani to Kashmir, who was able to influence the ruler, who spent more of his time in prayer and meditation, and abandoned a number of practices that were un-Islamic.

Famines occurred frequently during his reign and he helped his people by distributing free food to them. He was just and moderate in dealing with matters of the state which he attended to in person.

In 1389, he was succeeded by his minor son with his mother, Sura, acting as regent. She was assisted by two ministers Saha and Udda. The regent ruled with a heavy hand, putting down all opposition. Udda gained great power and first poisoned Sikander's younger brother, intending to eliminate the regent. His plans were upset when Sikander came of age in 1393 and took over the reins of government.

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Apprehending punishment for his past actions, Udda tried to ingratiate himself with the new ruler by suggesting that he should be allowed to conquer Ladakh. Sikander gladly agreed to this, seeing it as a way to get rid of him. But Udda returned victorious. This success led him to revolt against the ruler and he fled to Wular. Udda was entrapped in a pincer movement with the ruler on one side and his general Laddaraja on the other. On being captured and imprisoned, he committed suicide. After Udda's death, Suha Bhatta became Sikander's chïef minister. Udda had been the regent's minister before he tried to get into Sikander's good books. There were minor skirmishes with the ruler of Ohind and Jammu where both were defeated.

However, the major threat to Kashmir came from Timur during his invasion of India. Encamped on the banks of the Indus, he received homage from various rulers, including an emissary from Sikander who presented him with a horse and a robe of honour. The emissary was sent back to his master with the message that he should present himself before Timur. Sikander set out to do so, but was met by Timur's ministers who demanded a tribute of 30,000 horses and 1,00,000 silver coins-a demand Sikander was unable to meet at the time. He returned to Srinagar.

Timur proceeded towards Delhi and sacked it. On his return he presented Sikander with two elephants and sent envoys to demand an explanation regarding non-payment of the tribute demanded. Sikander's envoy Maulana Nur-ud-din Badakhshani carried a letter from him acknowledging Timur's suzerainty and promising to pay the demanded tribute. Timur's envoys to Sikander were reprimanded for demanding such a huge tribute beyond the ruler's ability to meet, and a message was sent that Sikander should meet Timur in person without fear. However,

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this was not to happen because by the time Sikander set out, Timur had already returned to Samarkand. In fact Sikander sent him expensive presents. Kashmir was thus saved from suffering the fate of Delhi at the hands of Timur.

The arrival of Sayyid Mir Muhammad Hamdani and his influence on both Sikander and his chief minister changed the situation radically. The once tolerant ruler was a Muslim but still clung to the ways of the old religion. Under the reforming influence of the Sayyid, he shed his earlier ways, and he, along with his newly converted fanatical chief minister, unleashed a reign of terror on the Pandits. They forcibly converted or killed them and drove those who could, to flee the Valley. Sikander became 'But Shikan'—the destroyer of temples and deities. This was the first such instance of forcible conversions to Islam by the ruler and the state.

Though Hindus suffered at his hands, he was generous towards his Muslim subjects. Schools were opened for them. A patron of literature, though with little learning himself, his court attracted scholars and Sufis from Persia and Central Asia. He built hospices and *khanaqas* in Sopore and Tral.

Sikander was succeeded by his son, Mir Khan, in 1413 as Ali Shah. His reign was marked by rebellions by some nobles; one of them being Ladda Magre who was defeated by him. He resumed the persecution of Hindus with even greater severity.

He again faced a challenge to his authority by nobles and his younger brother, Shahi Khan was able to help him get rid of them, thus earning the position of his chief minister.

The Sultan placed Shahi Khan on the throne when he left Srinagar on a pilgrimage. Before he could return, Shahi Khan had allied himself with the ruler of Sialkot against Ali Shah.

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Shahi Khan managed to enter Srinagar, but Ali Shah returned with the help of Jammu forces and attempted to recover his kingdom—an unsuccessful venture which ended with his capture and death in 1420.

Zain-ul-abidin succeeded him and his reign of fifty years (1420–1470) is remembered as a golden period in the history of Kashmir. A tolerant ruler, he ruled with equity and brought a period of peace and prosperity. He extended his kingdom to the neighbouring hill states, including Ladakh and Baltistan. He also maintained friendly ties with distant neighbours up to Mecca in the west and Tibet in the east. In India, he had cordial ties with Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat and Sind and parts of Rajasthan–Malwa and Mewar.

Zain-ul-abidin is known for reforming and reconstructing his administrative setup into an efficient and successful system. Corruption was put down with a heavy hand. His greatest achievement was his religious tolerance and his encouragement of the return of Pandits, who had fled the Valley in the wake of the persecution instigated by the Sayyids. He acknowledged the learning and medicine of the Pandits, and their contribution to his own administration. Hindus rose to high positions in his court as the chief justice, scientists, astrologers, physicians, commander-in-chief, and high officials.

He extended his patronage to scholars. Among them were Jonaraja and Srivara who continued the chronicle *Rajatarangini*. Among the social and charitable institutions he maintained were those that made education open to all; free dispensaries under qualified *vaids* and physicians; free food for the poor and infirm. In fact, providing food for the poor at special festivals was a regular feature during his reign.

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Everyone was equal before the law whether a commoner or one of his own courtiers. Capital punishment was awarded only for very serious offences. Laws were codified and inscribed on copper plates and were publicly displayed. A system of price control was also enforced. Cheating and profiteering were strongly discouraged. Arbitrary taxation was abolished and the tax structure reformed. Land tax was the main source of revenue as also fines, along with 1/6th tax on gold dust recovered from river banks. All important documents came to be registered for the first time in order to prevent forgery.

Agriculture and the welfare of cultivators were promoted. Revenue was collected in kind and stored in granaries, and fixed at 1/6th of the yield and reduced in years where there was a negligible yield to 1/7th in the worst affected areas, and a greater share was exacted in those areas less affected. In order to enhance agricultural production, Zain-ul-abidin constructed canals to improve irrigation of the dry plateaus in the Valley (some of which still exist). Jonaraja and Srivara penned down all important construction projects during his long peaceful reign. He also planted several gardens. The best known among them were named after him—Zainagir, Zaina Dab, Zainapur, and Zainakut—though these cannot be traced or identified today.

The construction of a network of canals ensured proper irrigation, covering practically the entire Valley and including an efficient drainage canal within the city. Seven masonry bridges were built over the river Jhelum to link Srinagar with the Dal.

Though famine and floods did occur towards the end of his reign, he did his best to help his subjects during such times by distributing free food, lowering taxes and advancing loans.

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One flood that almost devastated Srinagar prompted him to relocate the capital to a higher level at the foot of Hari Parbat. He was a great builder. Towns were founded by him. He completed the construction of the Jama Masjid started by his father, Sikander. The first wooden bridge in Srinagar, over the Jhelum, was constructed by him and named Zaina Kadal.[10]

On the Dal Lake, two artificial islands were constructed by him—the Sona Lank and the Rofh Lank. He is also credited with the construction of the Zaina Lank in the Wular Lake.

He was a great patron of education and literature, and was himself a poet. Under his patronage, Jonaraja wrote the history of Kashmir up to 1458, which was later resumed by his pupil, Srivara. There were several writers who wrote about this great king. A book on medicine was written in his time as also translations of the classics.

As a young boy, Zain-ul-abidin was sent by his father, Sikander, to the court of Timur at Samarkand, to pay tribute to the conqueror of Hindustan. Though he was received well by Timur, he was refused permission to return to Kashmir, and was not able to do so for seven long years. It was during this time that he acquired an interest in the arts and crafts for which Samarkand was famed, being at that time at the height of its glory under Timur.

On his return to Kashmir after the death of Timur in 1405, and his ascending the throne in 1420, he invited skilled artisans and craftsman from Samarkand to Kashmir to teach and train the locals with their special skills. The handicrafts that he introduced then, and for which Kashmir is famous even today, are carpet weaving, silk production, paper making and papier-mâché. The

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Kashmiris with their natural artistic bent have created beautiful designs using motifs and colours occurring in nature to embellish them, creating a worldwide market for them. From the earlier shattered economy of the country following the internecine struggles for power, he was able to turn Kashmir into a productive centre of home-based industry. This helped restore the confidence of the demoralized people by giving them the means to sustain themselves through trading in the commodities they produced. The shawl industry was a particularly profitable one. Local artisans and craftsmen were encouraged to learn new crafts and were given liberal financial aid. Criminals serving sentences in prisons were required to learn some art or craft, a practice that continues to this day in the prison system in Kashmir.

Under him music and dance that had been banned in the two previous reigns were revived, as also drama.

His greatest achievement, however, was his great tolerance of the Hindus, which brought them back to the Valley from their exile. Cow slaughter was banned, as also the killing of birds and fish in the *Nags* sacred to the Hindus.

He participated in most Hindu festivals and generously distributed alms. Old temples were repaired and two new ones built under his rule. These were endowed with rent-free land for their maintenance. He undertook several social reforms including those to prevent harassment of lower caste women by the Brahmins and the trafficking of women.

His people loved and revered him and he is known even today as 'Bad Shah'. His last years however saw fratricidal wars among his sons, the death of his dear and close relatives and friends, including his beloved queen, and loyal ministers. His own

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health gradually declined. The intrigues of the princes brought insecurity to the country. The year 1470 brought a great reign of a great ruler to a rather sad closure.

With his death came a decline of the peace, prosperity and stability that he had brought in. A succession of weak rulers brought the country to the verge of chaos and confusion which paved the way for the rise of the Chak dynasty in 1561 until 1586 before Kashmir was annexed by Akbar in 1588. All these orchestrated the sad end of the Kashmir Sultanate.

3.2 The Rise of the Chaks

Even before the death of their father, Zain-ul-abidin's sons were already rivals for the throne. Prior to his death, the king had tried to ensure a peaceful succession, but exasperated and embittered by the hostility of the brothers towards each other, he died without naming anyone. An armed attempt by his youngest son, Behram, to take the throne was outmanoeuvred by his second son Haji who ascended as Haider Shah. But his rule lasted for merely two years. The eldest, Adam, returned to Jammu to his maternal uncle, Manek Dev's court, where he died in an encounter between the Jammu forces and the Turks.

Haider Shah proved to be a degenerate ruler and this resulted in the break away of territories that had paid tribute to Kashmir. Hassan, his younger son, reasserted Kashmir's claim to those territories. In his absence of six months, Behram had taken advantage of the king's neglect of the administration and built his own influence at court and with the army, with the intent of deposing the king.

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Haider Shah died following a fall in a drunken state, which, combined with his earlier ailments, proved fatal. Behram was encouraged by the king's treasurer—an influential noble—to ascend the throne, after appointing Hassan as his heir. He rejected the latter's proposal with the result that the treasurer then helped Hassan to take the throne and fight Behram, who fled. Though Hassan had come to his father's aid in restoring lost territories, he did not prove to be an able ruler.

Civil wars and political unrest following Zain-ul-abidin's death provided the fertile grounds for the take over of Kashmir by the Chak dynasty, and later by the Mughals. The hundred years or more (1476–1588) of the last of the Shah Mirs and the Chaks reduced the country to chaos and a failed economy. The years 1470–1478 witnessed an almost tragically comic period of a game of 'musical chairs' being played for the throne between Mohammed Shah and Fateh Shah, the grandsons of 'Bad Shah'. With perpetual intrigues and counter-intrigues between rival factions, the Sayyids had, in the meantime, gained considerable influence with the king, who was a mere puppet in their hands.

The common man's fate during these uncertain times was unenviable. Tragically, when in the earliest times since their influx into the Valley, the Sufi Sayyids had brought a message of hope and succour to the oppressed common man; now, the later Sayyids were bent on oppressing him and ruining the king and country. With matrimonial alliances with powerful families, they had now gained a privileged position and were using their power to loot the country and sabotage the administration.

The last years of the Shah Mir dynasty were also the time when Kashmir was passing through a particularly devastating

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period in its history. Meanwhile, history was also being made in its immediate neighbourhood in Central Asia. The Mughals were building an empire, and a branch of this dynasty would soon be sending one of its own through the Khyber corridor into India to lay the foundations of yet another great empire. Kashmir was merely by this time, a considerably weak country that was just awaiting the attention of any would-be taker.

The fratricidal wars and constant conflicts between Shias and Sunnis had reduced Kashmir to a very vulnerable condition. Trade with neighbouring countries had sustained its needs for essentials such as salt and raw wool for its shawl and carpet industries. These trade routes ran through Central Asia. Because of the weakened condition of the country, the traders were preyed upon by bandits in the areas through which they passed, resulting in heavy losses and the collapse of the economy. There were no rulers to deal with the situation in the dying years of the Shah Mir Sultans. Two powerful families—the Magreys and the Chaks, who had been brought in earlier by the Sultans to assist them in ruling the country, and who dominated the military and the court—had started to take over the administrative and leadership roles from the pleasure-loving last descendants of previous dynasty. There was a constant struggle for power between members of these two families, who supported one or the other of the latest aspirants, to the throne of Kashmir. Malik Abdul Magrey and Kazi Chak were the latest to attempt this, with Magrey forcing Kazi Chak out of the Valley to seek shelter in Naushera in 1527.

This was when Kashmir faced an even greater threat of invasion by the Mughal ruler Babur, who had already established

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himself in Delhi and was attempting to extend his empire to the strategic Valley of Kashmir. Aware of the troubled conditions prevailing there, it seemed to be the opportune time to attempt to subdue it. An added incentive was the fabled beauty of the Valley and its salubrious climate that offered an escape to the Mughals from the searing summer heat of the plains, to an area closer to that of their own homeland in Central Asia.

The Mughal army that threatened invasion was led by Kuchak Beg and Ali Beg. Despite their mutual differences, Kazi Chak was able to rally the feudal chiefs of the Valley to join him to counter this threat even though Mohamed Shah had not given him specific orders to do so. The collective Kashmir forces inflicted a major defeat on the Mughal army and Kazi Chak emerged as the conquering hero. He was reappointed as the Wazir and deposed Mohammed Shah to set up his son Ibrahim on the throne. Magrey, his rival, had taken shelter with Babur, whom he persuaded to attempt another attack on Kashmir with a more efficient army. However, Babur who had rightly assessed the Kashmiri tendency to close ranks to face any invader, decided to use subterfuge. He used Nazuk Shah, another descendant of Zain-ul-abidin and declared him Sultan to replace Ibrahim. The ruse worked and the rebel chiefs with Nazuk Shah entered Kashmir, defeating Kazi Chak's forces. Magrey re-established himself. However Nazuk Shah's rule only lasted for a year, when Mohammed Shah was restored to the throne for the fifth time.

Magrey also decided to send back the Mughal forces with presents and their memories of the beauty of Kashmir, as well as the tales of constant internecine struggles that offered the opportunity for Mughal intervention and subjugation of Kashmir.

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Babur was succeeded by Humayun in whose time, Kamran, the Mughal governor of Punjab, led another campaign against Kashmir. The Kashmir forces could not resist the Mughals and they entered Srinagar without facing any resistance. Any forces that attempted to oppose them were cut down. Typically, thereafter, the Kashmiris banded together again and invited Kazi Chak to once again lead them in guerrilla warfare against the Mughals, who were forced to negotiate with the Chaks for a safe passage out of the Valley. After the withdrawal of the Mughals, Magrey once again sought to strengthen his position as Wazir by distributing land to his relatives to ensure their loyalty to him. This once again paved way for rivalry among the nobles who were unaware of the growing threat of yet another Tartar invasion from Central Asia by the petty chiefs who had established their fiefdoms there.

Amongst them was an adventurer, Mirza Haider Dughlat, who had led an army into Ladakh and Baltistan in 1532. From there he marched into the Valley through the Zoji La Pass and entered Srinagar. The city was ravaged by fire and sword.

Once again, the Kashmiris rallied under the joint leadership of Magrey and Chak to harass their common enemy. Mirza Haider was forced to sue for peace and allowed to leave the Valley.

This was however not the end of Kashmir's troubles. A severe famine immediately after left thousands dead, and their leaders had to make serious efforts to import food from surrounding regions of Jammu, Rajouri and Muzaffarabad. The next crop was bountiful and helped to negate the effect of the famine and for a while the Valley knew some peace. It was during this time that Mohammed Shah passed away after an "on and off" reign of twenty four years. He was succeeded by his son Shams-ud-

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din, who like his father came under the influence of Kazi Chak for his short reign of one year. His brother, Ismail Kazi, Chak's son-in-law succeeded him in 1538. But Kazi Chak was the virtual ruler until he was forced by other nobles to flee following this. The Valley was divided into three principalities—one headed by the exiled Kazi, the other with the Sultan, and the third with Sayyid Ibrahim Baihaqi who had helped Kazi return to power.

3.3 Mughal Rule

The Mughals were the Mongols of Central Asia. Their history starts with their ancestor, Genghis Khan, who established an empire stretching over most of Northern and Central Asia. After bringing several of the fierce, warlike tribes together, he and his army was dreaded by all.

India's connection with Genghis Khan comes with his descendent Timur from whom the Indian Mughal dynasty claimed descent. The Indian Mughal kings through Timur belonged to the Chaghatai branch, descended from Genghis Khan's second son of that name. Whatever their origins, Mughal or Turkish, by the time Babur established himself in India, and also due to their intermarriage with other tribes, the Mughals had lost much of their original ethnic characteristics.

Babur's and his subsequent descendant's interest in Kashmir was provoked not merely by its strategic position on the north-western boundary of his new empire in the corridor to Central Asia, but by the reports that sang bountiful praises of the beauty of the Valley and its wonderful climate, and also by the splendour of its capital city. This had come to Timur's notice when Sultan

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Sikander had paid tribute to him when he overran Jammu on his way back to Samarkand after sacking Delhi.

Babur had brought the 300-year old Delhi Sultanate of the Afghan rulers to an end after defeating the last of its rulers Ibrahim Lodi at the battle of Panipat in 1526. After an era of warring feudal fiefdoms over which the Lodis had only ineffectual control, the entry of the Mughals on the Indian stage ushered in an era of peace and prosperity. Under the first five Mughal emperors, the country was united under one strong central rule, even though to achieve that condition, they had had to make compromises to bring together the diverse elements over which they ruled. Once Babur had consolidated his position in Northern India, it was inevitable that he turn his attention to Kashmir, which in its condition of political and economic instability was ripe for the picking.

With the exception of Zain-ul-abidin, who had proved to be an effective ruler through most of his long reign of 50 years, the later Sultans were weak and ineffective rulers. They were largely puppets being manipulated by powerful and power-hungry noblemen with the two families of the Magreys and Chaks dominating the scene. The Shia-Sunni conflicts added grist to the mill, and things turned pretty chaotic by the time Babur turned his attention to Kashmir. Though he did not succeed in annexing Kashmir, he did manage to make it a tributary to the Mughals.

When Sultan Shams-ud-din ascended the throne in 1537, he was the son-in-law of Kazi Chak, who became the virtual ruler. This managed to put the Magreys up against him. They sought the help of Humayun against the Chaks. Humayun himself at

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the time was pitted against Sher Shah Suri, and had to flee Agra to Lahore. But Sher Shah Suri confronted him at Lahore too, forcing him to flee again, where Humayun sought the help of Mirza Dughlat to secure Kashmir for him; which he was able to do with Magrey's help. The convoluted politics of Kashmir forced Mirza's exit from the scene and allowed the rise of the Chaks to power.

Although the Chaks were great fighters, they were poor rulers. The weakening administration only aided the Mughals under Akbar to subdue the Valley—not by force but by subterfuge—when he exploited the Sunni-Shia conflicts raging during that time to promise support to the Chaks. He received envoys from Hussain Shah but Akbar's outrage at the treatment of Sunnis in Kashmir resulted in his outright rejection of Hussain Shah's overtures. This shock is said to have killed the ruler who was succeeded by his brother, Ali Shah Chak, who only succeeded when he agreed to acknowledge the Mughal Emperor as his overlord. He sent in his armies under his generals during Yusuf Shah Chak's reign but the natural defences of Kashmir and hostile weather conditions lay the Mughal army low. The Mughal general, Bhagwan Dass, tried to come to terms with Yusuf Shah, and was invited to the Mughal camp. He was taken to the court, only to be imprisoned and never to return to Kashmir. Yusuf was succeeded by his son Yaqub Shah.

During Yaqub Shah's reign, he was unable to prevent the persecution of the Sunnis, which led to a delegation approaching the Mughal Court again to help redress the people's problems. Akbar assured them of religious freedom, and freedom in internal affairs. It was promised that there would be no more forced labour, but the greatest assurance came from Akbar's promise

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that the nobles of the Sultanate of Kashmir would no longer be tolerated during the Mughal takeover as they had caused much conflict earlier. In 1886, Akbar's general Qasim Khan invaded Kashmir putting the last of the Chak rulers to flight. However peace evaded Kashmir for quite a while.

Qasim Khan faced resistance from the Kashmiris on two fronts—firstly from Shams Chak, a powerful member of the Chaks, and secondly from Yaqub Shah who fled to his father-in-law in Kishtwar to enlist his aid in fighting the Mughals. This two-pronged resistance forced the Mughal general to abandon the Srinagar palace which was taken over by Yaqub again. However, he alienated some of his influential courtiers when he executed Hussain Khan who had been earlier declared king by a section of the rebels. They abandoned him fearing a similar fate. The onset of the winter brought a lull in hostilities that were resumed in the spring of 1887 by both Yaqub and Shams on the outskirts of the city. Yaqub was defeated and fled, seeking the help of Shams to jointly fight Qasim. Qasim's forces had to take shelter behind the fortifications of the city, forcing him to appeal to Akbar to send an abler general to replace him.

Akbar responded with a strong force under Yusuf Khan Rizvi aided by two Kashmiris nobles, Baba Khalil and Mohammad Bhat. Yaqub attempted to deflect the might of the Mughal army at Pir Panjal but most of his own army defected and preferred to lay down their arms. Yaqub was forced to retire to Kishtwar. The Kashmiri forces under Shams decided to do the same, and he was forced to return to the hills in Karnah.

Eventually in the face of a strong Mughal force sent against Shams Chak, he was defeated. Yaqub, who attempted a comeback, decided to surrender in 1589 before Akbar paid his

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first visit to the Valley. He was pardoned and sent to Rohtas where he was held as virtual prisoner until his father Yusuf Shah's death. Following this, he was granted an allowance from a *jagir*. But before he could take over, he was poisoned by Kasim Khan who claimed to be Yusuf Shah's son and Yaqub's brother.

When Kashmir was annexed by Akbar, it ushered in a period which unlike the preceding one was peaceful and prosperous. Kashmir thus became a *subah* of the Mughal empire under a *Subehdar*. As part of the empire, it stood on the route to Central Asia. Trade flourished and Kashmir's isolation of earlier times from the rest of the world ceased. It drew visitors from all over by its great natural beauty. The Mughal emperors also favoured this *subah*. They often visited Kashmir during the hot summers of the plains. Their frequent visits to the Valley ensured that the place and the people were well administered, leaving no cause for complaints, except in the case of the last governor during Akbar's rule.

The major benefits to Kashmir came in the form of better administration as a uniform administrative system for every *subah* of the empire was in force. There was one official language, Persian, which particularly benefitted the Kashmiri Pandits who had mastered the language even during the Sultanate period. Also with their earlier experience of administration there was large scale recruitment of the Pandits into the administration. Officials in higher cadres were transferred every three or four years and there was accountability since inspecting officers came from the central capital.

During Akbar's reign of 19 years over Kashmir, there were four governors. During this time, much was done to undo the

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harsh laws of the earlier regimes. Pandits particularly benefitted as taxes, fines and other tributes that they had to pay for performance of their religious practices were revoked and Akbar also endeared himself to the community by visiting Martand and distributing cows to the Brahmins there. Sunnis, who had been persecuted earlier, were relieved by the abolishing of any religious distinctions.

After annexing Kashmir, Akbar attempted to address the problems of his new subjects. When they resented the presence of Mughal soldiers in the city, and being harassed by them, he decided to move the soldiers to a new location on the Hari Parbat. A new township came up there which was named Nagar Nagar and was in striking contrast to the old city. Soldiers refrained from harassing citizens, as well as cultivators under threat of severe action against those who did so. Akbar visited the Valley three times during his reign as ruler of Kashmir. It was his suggestion that resulted in the building of some boats for residential purposes quite like the present day houseboats. It was while he was in Kashmir that he realized that the land revenue assessment was different from what it was elsewhere in his dominion and he wanted it revised and on a par with the rest.

Initially, he appointed two officials to review and reassess it, but this led to great resentment not only by the cultivators but local officials who refused to cooperate. Their complaint to Akbar, resulted in two more officials being sent to assist the first. The assessment was raised to half of the produce as against the earlier one-third. This led to further discontent amongst not merely the nobles, but the soldiers posted there, whose pay was in cash rather than in kind, that is, grain. They rose in

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revolt against the assessors who were forced to flee, one of them reaching Agra to appraise the Emperor.

Akbar responded by sending a strong force to suppress the rebels and followed it by himself proceeding to Kashmir to deal with Mirza Yadgar who opposed the Mughal Army. He was captured and beheaded. Mirza Yusuf Khan, who was the then governor, expressed his inability to enforce the new assessment and asked to be relieved. The whole province was declared as crown land and put in the charge of Khwaja Shams-ud-din. Akbar dealt severely with the rebels and richly rewarded those who had remained loyal during the revolt. To consolidate his position, he married a daughter of Shams Chak, and Salim took a daughter of Hussain Chak into his harem. To further strengthen his position, he created work for the poor and starving people by building fortifications around the Hari Parbat, and a palace and a city within.

To achieve the settlement of land and revenue assessment, Akbar recruited experienced Kashmiri Pandits on a very large scale. This helped to bring it on a par with the system operating under Todar Mal elsewhere.

On his return to Lahore after a visit of over three months, he appointed Mohd Quli Khan as the new governor. He dealt with the simmering resentment of the Chaks with ruthlessness, though he attempted to pacify and win over peace-loving citizens with good will. The local labour working on the city walls and palace at Hari Parbat were well paid and the fort which stands even today was completed in eight years. He invited the emperor to visit Kashmir when the palace was completed. Akbar arrived in 1598 accompanied by some Europeans—the first to visit Kashmir. However, the Valley at that time was being devastated

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by famine. Akbar provided relief by importing food grains from the plains and thousands of people were fed daily at the Idgah. New public works were undertaken to provide employment. Fortunately a good crop following this year dissipated the famine conditions. To celebrate the end of the famine and the inauguration of the new city, Akbar participated in the festivities and held a durbar.

It was also during this time that Ladakh and Baltistan were subjugated. Envoys sent to negotiate with the rulers to accept suzerainty were rejected. The chief of Baltistan challenged the emperor by bringing Ladakh under his control. This forced Akbar to summon forces from Lahore to attack the chieftain. Faced with the formidable force, he fled leaving Balistan and Ladakh to Mughal occupation. Kashmir, which by now had been pacified under the 11-year long reign of Quli Khan, was now put under the charge of Ali Akbar. There were floods and famines in his time, and it was during his term that Akbar died in 1605, to be succeeded by his son Jehangir.

Jehangir, even during this father his three visits to Kashmir. With his love of nature, he was totally smitten by Kashmir, where he and his wife spent many summers. During his reign, Kashmir enjoyed a time of justice and fair play. He had five governors to administer the province, all of whom except the last, Itqad Khan, were efficient and ensured the well-being of the people. His frequent presence in the Valley ensured good administration. He personally entertained people's grievances and took immediate action.

During his time, plague swept over the Valley and fire devastated thousands of houses in the city, including the Jama Masjid which was rebuilt at state expense. It was also during his

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time, that the Shalimar and Nishat Gardens were laid out on the banks of the Dal Lake. The springs at Verinag and Achhabal drew the attention of Jehangir and his wife. Verinag was encircled by an octagonal enclosure while the Achhabal spring had a beautiful garden with fruit trees laid out around it.

It was not as if all Jehanjir's concerns were with beauty and the natural surroundings. He was also concerned with what he observed were some painful customs that were followed by the local people—female infanticide; practice of Sati even by the Muslims in the *subah*, whereby widows were buried alive along with their husbands. Forced conversions by either community were also discouraged by him. He put a ban on all these distressing customs and prohibited the marriage of a Muslim girl to a Hindu. Some of the unjust taxes such as the *Rasum-i-Faujdar* were also abolished. Under him Kashmir prospered. The only blot on his otherwise good reign was the governor, Itqad Khan, who administered Kashmir for 11 years. His harsh treatment of people, enforcement of unjust levies and taxes, the resumption of free labour for the benefit of himself and his officials, his harassment of the Shias, and his terrorizing of the people who dared to complain to the emperor, marred the happier half of Jehangir's reign of 22 years.

Ill health of the emperor and being a close relative of Noor Jehan had probably made it possible for the governor to have his own way. It was during his time that in 1627, Jehangir made his last visit to Kashmir. In frail health, he had come to recoup but to no avail. Advised to return to the plains at the end of summer, he passed away on 7 November 1627. On his death bed, he expressed his desire to be carried back and buried at his

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favourite spot, Verinag. But Noor Jehan thought it was more important to carry him to Lahore where he was buried.

Jehangir was succeeded by his son, Shah Jehan, who ruled from 1627 to 1658. Kashmir and its inhabitants had good reason to remember his benevolence and concern for them. He took greater interest in their welfare than his father, though initially they continued to suffer for a further six years under Itqad Khan. Forced labour was used for saffron harvesting. A surcharge was levied on each measure of rice collected. Land revenue was collected in cash at enhanced rates, rather than in kind. Boatmen had to pay enhanced uniform taxes against the earlier practice of graded levies on the basis of age. He appointed his own agents to pick the fruit from private orchards and for selling it at his own rates. Owners who were ruined preferred to cut down their fruit trees rather than let him benefit from them. Shah Jehan finally removed the governor and appointed a better man in his place, Zaffar Khan Ahsan. He also abolished all the unjust practices of the previous *subehdar*, with stern orders against any infringement of the royal orders.

It was also under Zaffar Khan that finally Baltistan was subdued and though the Mughal army had to face great difficulties negotiating the mountain passes in rain and snow, they were able to bring the region and its ruler under their control.

Shah Jehan, like his father, was a great lover of Kashmir's natural beauty and in his time too several gardens were laid out by his governor. Zaffar Khan also helped improve the quality of the fruits of Kashmir's orchards—cherry, plum, peach and grapes—by bringing in saplings and grafts from Persia and Kabul. The emperor visited Kashmir twice during this governor's

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time, which lasted from 1634 to 1638. There were devastating floods during his second visit, which destroyed standing crops, but relief was organized by import of grain from the plains and its free distribution to the people.

It was also during this time that there were serious Shia-Sunni conflicts but these were put down very firmly by Zaffar Khan and the Sunni leader was exiled to Agra. Zaffar Khan was replaced by Prince Murad, the younger son of Shah Jehan. However, his indolent ways and the advantages taken by his in-laws—the Maliks of southern Kashmir—resulted in looting and extortion of farmers. This led to his recall to Agra within a year.

He was replaced by Ali Mardan Khan. The credit of laying out the beautiful gem-like Chashma Shahi Garden goes to him. He was also responsible for a network of roads lined with poplars. On the Mughal Road over the Pir Punjal, he also built several *sarais*. A tolerant man, he appointed a Pandit, Mahadev, as his chief advisor. Shah Jehan, known for his beautiful buildings at Agra—the Fort and the Taj Mahal—also left his mark in Kashmir in the beautiful upper pavilions and fountains at Shalimar Bagh. The Pari Mahal above the spur overlooking the Dal Lake is attributed to his son Dara Shikoh. Pari Mahal acted as Dara's observatory, as well as a Sufi school.

In Shah Jehan's time, Kashmiri artisans refined their skills and helped in building and the laying out of Mughal gardens elsewhere in the Empire. The Jama Masjid at Srinagar, which was twice destroyed by fire and rebuilt by Jehangir, was later to be restored by Aurangzeb.

In 1658, Aurangzeb took the throne of Agra by defeating and killing his brothers and imprisoning his father in the Agra Fort. This marked the beginning of the end of the

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Mughal Empire that had been built and consolidated by Akbar and his two successors. Unlike his tolerant and benevolent predecessors, Aurangzeb was bigoted and an intolerant ruler. Where the earlier tolerant and emancipated rulers had brought about amity and goodwill between the various communities, Aurangzeb now followed the path of religious persecution against the Hindus.

He was a good administrator, was honest and put down corruption with a severe hand. He himself led a puritanical and simple life. He visited Kashmir only once during his reign, but that experience over difficult mountain passes with the locals transporting baggage and supplies led him to consider it an unnecessary luxury. It gave him the opportunity to observe at first hand, the situation which was prevalent there, inspect various departments, and ensure an efficient and clean administration. In his long reign of 49 years, Kashmir was administered by 14 governors, most of whom proved to be good and were able to offer help and relief to the people in times of famine, floods and fire.

However, there was an exception. Among the governors was Iftikar Khan, who harassed and brutalized the Pandits to such an extent that they had to seek the help of Guru Tegh Bahadur to intervene. This led to the brave Guru's martyrdom, following which the Sikh community rallied under his son Guru Gobind Singh into the militant Khalsa. There were other governors between 1690 and 1698, who tyrannized the Pandits and forced them to flee the Valley.

There was one Fazal Khan who sought to mitigate the harm done by the intolerant governors. He abolished several taxes and lifted restrictions imposed on them. In the good times, people in

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general were content and were able to make progress as skilled artisans and craftsmen. The shawl trade was thriving and made a substantial contribution to the economy. But Kashmir was now essentially a Muslim province, with a negligible Pandit community. The skilled craftsmen, wood and wool workers were all Muslims as they are even to this day.

The death of Aurangzeb in 1707 saw a period of tussle between his three sons for the throne. They were viceroys in Punjab and Kabul, and the Deccan. The eldest being closest at Lahore took over and crowned himself as Bahadur Shah. His second son, who was viceroy of Bengal and Bihar, moved to Agra to take over the treasury of his grandfather, helping his own father to consolidate his position and hold over all of North India.

Azam Shah, second son of Aurangzeb and Viceroy of the Deccan, ascended the throne at Ahmednagar, his dead father's earlier seat of power. Backed by his son Bidar Bakht, who was leading a strong army, they confronted Bahadur Shah's army in 1707, but after initial successes they were defeated and Bidar Bakht and his brother were slain in battle as also Azam, resulting in the rest of the army fleeing.

However, Bahadur Shah's victory ensured only a short respite for him. His youngest brother, Kam Baksh, rose in revolt against him in the Deccan, crowning himself at Bijapur. Faced with defeat at the hands of the imperial forces and with his own troops deserting him, he was mortally wounded near Hyderabad.

But the seeds of disintegration had already been sown in the time of Aurangzeb himself. The Rajputs had risen in revolt and dealt some blows to the dying empire. In the north-west, the Khalsa had risen against the Mughals, to be followed by the

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Maratha uprising in the south and west. Telling blows against the empire had been delivered by all these.

Owing to the disturbed conditions prevailing over most of North India, it was difficult for the court at Agra to exercise proper control over Kashmir. This resulted in a rule by proxy of the deputies of the governors who were reluctant to move out of court to Kashmir, for fear of losing their own positions due to the rapidly-changing power equations at court.

Kashmir and its people were left at the mercy of these agents of the governors who used the opportunity to make the maximum profits out of their positions. There was no way in which they could complain to the powers at Agra for redress. The only course open to them was to initiate an open revolt against their tormenters, which they did by setting fire to the residences of the deputies and other high officials. There were several short-lived successors to the first deputy. Kashmir was afflicted with fires and floods during this time until Bahadur Shah's death in 1712.

A war of succession between his four sons further weakened the empire's tenuous hold on Kashmir. Kashmir was vulnerable because of its distance from the capital, as well as attacks from its own neighbours. It was natural that local leaders should attempt to assert themselves. There was also the rivalry of the Sayyids, who were always looking to assert themselves. There were also the constant tussles between groups of nobles from Central Asia, and those from Persia. In those uncertain times, the political and economic situation was the worst imaginable. In 1872, taking advantage of the situation at the empire's capital, the Sheikh-ul-Islam issued orders for stern measures against the

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Hindu population which the then deputy refused to heed. The Mullah then instigated his followers to plunder and set fire to the Hindu houses. Unable to handle the situation, the deputy appealed for help from Delhi. Before the Mughal force could arrive, the Shias also became the targets of persecution and there was total mayhem, prompting the emperor to dismiss the governor and send in a strong force under the new deputy, Abdul Samad Khan, who entered Kashmir in 1772 and put to death several insurgents to bring the situation under control. He was the saviour of the Pandits—removing all restrictions imposed on them regarding use of their caste marks, turbans and riding. But this relief was not to last for long. The empire was fast disintegrating under the onslaught on various fronts—the Jats in Bharatpur, the Marathas in Malwa, Gujarat and Deccan, the Sikhs in Punjab and the Rajputs in Rajasthan. The final onslaught was that of Nadir Shah of Persia, who led an armed invasion in 1739, and entered Delhi. He ordered a general massacre and sacking of the capital before returning to Persia with the Peacock Throne of Delhi.

Kashmir was going through an equally tempestuous time. Caught in the net of intrigues and rivalry of local factions, nature too was unkind, and in 1746–47 a devastating flood engulfed crops that were ripe and ready for harvesting. A severe famine followed killing three-fourths of the population. Starving Kashmiris survived by fleeing to the plains and settling down there. It was this period that saw the rise of an Afghan, Ahmed Shah Abdali, who had served under Nadir Shah. With the assassination of Nadir Shah, Ahmed Shah Abdali established himself at Herat after expelling Nadir Shah's governor.

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After taking over Lahore, Abdali attempted to repeat Nadir Shah's capture of Delhi. However, his plan was thwarted by the Mughal army at Sirhind under the Mughal Emperor himself. He was defeated after a bloody battle and retreated to Afghanistan. But by now, the Mughal Empire had been reduced to a fraction of its original extent; it now merely encompassed the northern half of the Gangetic Doaba and a strip of territory of a hundred mile width. The nobles of the empire had divided it up among themselves, as the emperor's authority diminished.

It was under these conditions, with Kashmir devoid of troops and ill-supplied to counter any attack, that the deputy governor conspired with Ahmed Shah Abdali to help him in a campaign against the Mughals. In 1748, Abdali sent a strong force to occupy Kashmir. However, his commander could not succeed and was killed and his force scattered.

It was when Ahmed Shah succeeded Mohammed Shah as emperor of Delhi that things got much worse in Kashmir. There were constant conflicts between the local nobles and the followers of the Mughal governors. The deputy governor of Kashmir was poisoned by a paid agent of Abdali's governor of Peshawar. He was succeeded by his minor son, under the guardianship of Malik Hassan Irani, whose true intention was to usurp power. But Malik Hassan was dismissed by Ahmed Shah, who appointed a new governor, Alaquli Khan. As was the custom by then, Alaquli appointed his deputy but it was a Kashmiri this time—Mir Muqim Kanth. Finding the treasury empty, Kanth adopted measures to cut down on expenditure by disbanding a large number of troops and cutting down the salaries of the rest. This led to an uprising by the disbanded troops under Abul

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Qasim Khan who drove Mir Muqim Kanth away, and set himself up as an independent ruler of Kashmir.

Mir Muqim Kanth and Khwaja Zahir Didamari, both Kashmiris, took the step to invite Abdali to invade Kashmir. In 1753, Abdali was only too happy to accept the invitation, and sent in a strong Afghan force to take over Kashmir. Fifteen days of fierce fighting near Shopian with heavy loss of men on both sides resulted in the defeat of Abdul Qasim's commander, and Qasim himself left the field, was arrested and sent to Kabul. With the Afghan flag planted on Akbar's fort at Nagar Nagar, the Mughal rule in Kashmir came to an end.

3.4 Afghan Rule

From the earliest times, Kashmir had been linked with Afghanistan, a region that had provided the corridor of entry from Central Asia into the fertile plains of Punjab. This corridor had been used by the Aryans when they split with the Iranians, with whom they had had a long stay as one community in this area that had come to be known as 'Udayana'—the Garden of ancient Persia. It was through this region that had been a satrap in 500 BC of the Iranian king Darius, that Alexander, the conqueror from Macedonia, had led his victorious Greek troops as far as the Indus during his foray into India. With his early death, his empire was split up among his generals whom he had left behind to administer the conquered territories. Bactria was ruled independently by Philip; Kabul, Ghazni and Kandahar were placed under Strasanor and Sibertius. Though they had been Alexander's generals and his satraps, there were constant rivalries and conflicts between them for several years.

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It was only in the time of Chandragupta Maurya that part of this territory to the west of the Indus, that had been part of the Emperor Ashoka's Indian empire, was ceded to Seleukus through a marriage contract. He was by then an emperor of a vast area from the Euphrates in the west, to the Oxus in the north and the Indus to the east. Sixty years later, a Greek dynasty ruled over the whole of Afghanistan, but part of this region had been originally populated by the Aryans, who were Hindus. After Ashoka and his conversion to Buddhism, the majority also converted to Buddhism.

The Scythians pushed the Greeks out of this area towards India, where they established their kingdoms on the Indus. It was during the time of Kanishka, a Scythian (Kushan) ruler and a staunch Buddhist, that Buddhism took firm root in Afghanistan and the region flourished. At that time, there was constant interaction between India and Central Asia, with trade, commerce, and cultural exchanges between them. This resulted in a contented, peaceful time for its people.

However, soon the Kushans were ousted by the Turks and the Tartars of Central Asia and there was a constant struggle between several of these dynasties over this territory. Both Turks and Indians were in control, and it was only in the 10th Century that the last of the Indian rulers capitulated to the Turk Subaktigin, who established himself at Ghazni. Until the middle of the 12th Century, descendents of Mahmud of Ghazni ruled this region; it was later succeeded by the Ghori dynasty, of which Shibab-ud-din Mohammed invaded India several times.

Subsequently, it was the Tartar (Mongol) ruler Timur, who took over Afghanistan. Kabul remained in the hands of one of his descendents until it was taken over in 1504 by Babur,

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who founded the Mughal Empire in India in 1562. Kabul and Kandahar (Gandhara or Udayana of ancient times) remained a part of the Mughal Empire.

After Mahmud Ghazni's attempted invasion of Kashmir in 1015, links between Afghanistan and Kashmir were limited until Akbar annexed Kashmir to his empire, when Kashmir remained part of the province of Kabul. During the time of the early Mughal rulers, there was a resumption of political and commercial interaction between these two subdivisions of the province of Kabul. While in ancient times, peaceful relations prevailed between the two regions, with the Turks and the Mongols, this situation fast deteriorated with the original peace-loving and cultured people being displaced and dominated by the fiercer people and clans that came in with the Turks and Mongols. Rivalry between these clans and tribes resulted in constant warfare between them, and human life had little value in their bloody conflicts. With all the various ethnic groups that had passed through this corridor, the original earliest inhabitants, the Indo-Europeans, who were peace-loving and prosperous people, were by this time largely replaced by the fierce clans and tribes of Turkish and Mongol origin. By the beginning of the 18th Century, the Safavi dynasty of Persia had little control over Afghanistan, which fell into the hands of feuding nobles. In 1729, a Turk, Nadir Quli, took control and extended the Persian influence to its original borders. He ascended the Persian throne as Nadir Shah.

Nadir Shah descended on the Mughal Empire at Delhi and gave it a deadly blow. His army included a large number of Afghans, whom he had recruited for his invasion of India. Among

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these was a young soldier, Ahmed Khan, of the Abdali clan, who rose in Nadir Shah's army to the position of a commander governing 6,000 men. At the time of Nadir Shah's assassination in 1747, Ahmed Khan had control of 10,000 horsemen and the treasure that Nadir Shah had brought back with him from Delhi. He was able to bring order to the eastern part of Nadir Shah's empire and was chosen by the other chieftains as king, after which his clan came to be known as 'Durrani'.

Having established himself in his own territories, he embarked on an invasion of India, with the conquest of Lahore in 1749. Lahore was then an important seat of the Mughals. From there, he proceeded to Delhi, but his force was halted at Sirhind by the Mughals under their then ruler, Ahmed Shah, and they were forced to retreat to Afghanistan. He made a second attempt two years later, but was not able to go beyond Lahore, where the governor bought him off by ceding the revenues of four sub-districts. Like his predecessor Nadir Shah, he too took back a vast treasure to his own country. From there, he turned his attention to securing Herat, Meshad, and Nishapur. In 1751, he attacked India for the third time, and though he met with stiff resistance, he reached Delhi and took it. Ahmed Shah (the Mughal ruler) was forced to cede Punjab and Multan to him.

It was at this point when Ahmed Shah Abdali was in Lahore, that he received the invitation from two Kashimiri noblemen to come to the rescue of Kashmir and rid it of its oppressive Mughal governors and their agents. He sent in a strong force against Kashmir under his commander Ishk Aqasi. After bloody encounters with the Mughal forces there, Aqasi annexed the territory to Afghanistan. Though the Afghans were there to free

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Kashmir from the oppression of the Mughals, they proved no less oppressive. In the 67 years that they ruled over Kashmir, they reduced the Valley to a state of impoverishment and slavery, and the people to the worst condition that they had ever experienced in their long history. The reign of terror that was unleashed on them was unprecedented considering that these were fellow Muslims who were supposed to be their liberators. No class was spared. Nobles and merchants alike were stripped of their wealth under the threat of death. The plight of the common people can well be imagined. Abdali's commander collected immense wealth during the five months that he stayed in the Valley. Hindu traders who had established their businesses there were forced to leave. He left the administration to Abdullah Khan Kabuli and appointed a Khatri, Sukh Jiwan Mal, as his chief advisor.

In Sukh Jiwan Mal, the oppressed Kashmiris perceived a way out of the tyrannical Afghan rule. An influential noble, Abul Hassan Bandey conspired with Sukh Jiwan Mal to rid themselves of the Afghan administrator. Within just a few months of his appointment, the Afghan Sirdar and his son were assassinated, and Sukh Jiwan Mal stepped in as virtual ruler of Kashmir. Taking advantage of Ahmed Shah Abdali's absence in Punjab and Persia, Sukh Jiwan Mal declared his independence from Afghanistan in 1754. Ahmed Shah was unable to deal with the situation immediately, and decided to bide his time and confirmed him as Viceroy of Kashmir and appointed another Afghan, Khwaja Kijak, to work as his deputy.

To finance his continuing campaigns in India against the Marathas and Sikhs, Abdali needed to raise additional funds to replenish his empty treasury. He demanded a huge sum of several crore rupees from Sukh Jiwan Mal to be raised by any means

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from the Kashmiris. On hearing this, the people organized a stiff resistance under Bandey and refused to pay the taxes. They also persuaded Sukh Jiwan Mal to banish Khwaja Kijak and his supporters from the Valley. The Afghan forces were defeated at Baramulla and for a while Kashmir was free from the Afghans.

Ahmed Shah Abdali retaliated against this outrage and sent in a force of 30,000 Afghans under Ishk Aqasi to deal with the situation. Unfortunately for the Afghan force, they chose the wrong time of the year to attempt to subdue the Kashmiris—mid-winter with the passes under twenty feet of snow. Though Sukh Jiwan Mal led a smaller and less well-equipped force, the Afghan force was dealt an annihilating defeat. Ahmed Shah Abdali was at the time facing an equally challenging situation in Punjab with his governor Muglani Begum being taken prisoner by the Mughal Emperor Alamgir II's governor. Seizing the opportunity, Sukh Jiwan Mal declared his allegiance to the emperor at Delhi and was rewarded with the title of 'Raja' and given complete control over Kashmir.

On the advice of his chief minister, Abul Hassan Bandey, Sukh Jiwan Mal also decided to replace the wardens of the passes with trusted officers, and deployed 30,000 soldiers trained in mountain warfare, to guard the passes into the Valley. However the Kashmiris were ill-fated and 1755 brought unseasonal rains and a severe famine followed. Though seeds were distributed by the administration to ensure a good crop the following year, it was not enough to prevent the scarcity from continuing for two more years. Locusts destroyed standing crops but the starving people used these for food in desperation.

If this was not enough of a bad situation, a huge arsenal that the Raja had built up near his palace was engulfed by fire,

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which resulted in an explosion that destroyed everything in the vicinity, and drastically reduced the Raja's firepower at a crucial time. Though the people of Kashmir had had a brief respite from Afghan oppression during his time, his rule was not destined to continue.

Abdali, who had been biding his time, sent in the Kashmiri noble Mir Muqim Kanth to create a rift between the Raja and his minister Abul Hassan Bandey. By levelling false charges against him, Kanth was able to get Bandey dismissed and appoint himself in his stead. It did not take long for the Raja to discover his mistake, which he swiftly remedied by dismissing Kanth and reinstating Bandey.

By 1758, Abdali's position in India had become tenuous and Sukh Jiwan Mal tried to use the opportunity to make forays into Bhimbar and Rajouri. However he was forced to retreat before the combined forces of the Afghan governor of Sialkot and the Raja of Jammu. This defeat undermined his position in the Valley and gave a signal to the Bombas to attack the northern districts of the Valley, but the Raja was able to repel the attack and drive them out. Bandey was the next to revolt, but he too was routed and fled to Poonch.

In order to reinforce his dwindling authority, the Raja appointed Mahanand Dhar as his chief minister, who instigated a policy of religious persecution that further alienated the people. The Raja also invited a large number of Brahmins from the Punjab to settle in the Valley, thus hoping to consolidate his position against his Muslim subjects. However instead of helping him to do so, these people only made matters worse by indulging in loot and arson.

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Unfortunately for the Raja, by this time Ahmed Shah Abdali had managed to subdue the Punjab by dealing a powerful blow to the Marathas there. He now turned his attention to dealing with Raja Sukh Jiwan Mal. He sent in a force under Nur-ud-din Khan Bamzai through the Toshamaidan Pass. Sukh Jiwan Mal at the head of a force of 40,000 marched to meet the Afghan forces. The battle had barely commenced than the greater part of his force deserted him and he was captured by the Afghans and blinded and taken to Lahore where Ahmed Shah ordered that he be trampled to death by an elephant. This ended his rule that had started with an opportunistic, treacherous act on his part. There are historians (some no doubt appointed by him) who would speak highly of him, but events during his short rule only served to highlight some of the less laudable of characteristics of the Kashmiris, that centuries earlier, Kalhana had written about.

Nur-ud-din Bamzai helped to stabilize Kashmir in the year he stayed there before his return to Kabul. He left the administration in the hands of a new governor, Buland Khan Bamzai, who proved to be an indolent man. Soon Shia-Sunni conflicts escalated leading to loot and arson directed against the Shias. Soon after in 1764, a bitterly cold winter followed, freezing all the water bodies and driving the people to extreme measures like cutting down fruit trees and pulling down timber from roofs to use as fuel to fight the cold. Buland Khan Bamzai gave up his position and while on his way back to Kabul, died at Jammu.

He was replaced by Nur-ud-din Khan Bamzai on his second stint as governor. A wise and experienced administrator, he

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thought it fit to associate two leading local nobles of the Kanth and Dhar families with his government. Mir Muqim Kanth was his Dewan, while Kailash Dhar was his revenue collector. This arrangement worked for a while until their mutual distrust ruined the arrangement and relations between them. A rather typical situation developed, with Kanth persuading the governor to get Dhar to exact daily rather than monthly revenue payments, thus putting him in a rather difficult position. Typical too, was what followed. Within a month Mir Muqim was murdered with the finger of suspicion pointing in Dhar's direction. The murdered man's relatives produced evidence and made allegations which however failed to elicit action from the governor against Dhar. Faqir Ullah, Kanth's son, left the Valley to seek refuge with the Bomba king of Muzzafarabad.

In 1765, the governor left the government of Kashmir in the hands of his nephew, Jan Mohamed Khan, with Gurmukh Singh as his chief advisor in order to go and meet Abdali at Lahore. Again typically, as soon as Bamzai was out of the Valley, Lal Khan Khattak, a *jagirdar* of Biru, attacked Jan Mohamed's forces and defeating them proclaimed his independence. He let loose a wave of murder, loot and arson on the people, particularly the Hindus. Shias were also targeted. To add to their misery, a severe famine took a toll of many lives. The atrocities of Lal Khan continued for another six months, when Abdali sent in a strong force under a new governor, Khurram Khan, to restore the Valley to normalcy.

Khurram Khan attempted to undo the damage done by Lal Khan. He appointed Kailash Dhar as his chief minister, thus hoping to allay the fears of the Hindu population. Faqir

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Ullah, in alliance with the Bomba Chieftain, Mohamed Khan, made a bid to seize Kashmir from the Afghans. He led them on a wild goose chase all over the Valley, until he could make a connection with Lal Khan, and together they marched on Srinagar. Khurram abandoned Srinagar, and fled to Kabul, with Kailash Dhar following him.

The Bombas, traditional enemies of the Kashmiris, seized the opportunity to indulge in a savage wave of murder and looting of the citizens until Faqir Ullah put an end to it by ordering his allies out of the Valley. The year that followed saw Faqir Ullah Kanth avenging his father's death by ruthlessly persecuting Hindus. Many converted to Islam to escape death, and many more fled the Valley. This was the time when there was a mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits to the plains where they settled down in Delhi, Lucknow and Allahabad. Faqir Ullah believed that he was safe from Abdali, who was tied down in the Punjab, and declared his independence. He gave himself up to a life of indulgence and tyranny, causing half of the population to leave.

No sooner did Abdali learn of the situation in Kashmir, than he once again despatched his trusted general, Nur-ud-din Bamzai to deal with it and restore order. Offering Kanth generous terms if he surrendered, which he ignored, he was forced to resort to force. He routed the rebels and put them to flight to the hills of Karna where Faqir Ullah died. This was Bamzai's third tenure as governor in Abdali's lifetime.

The Afghan rule in Kashmir was a rule by proxy. Ahmed Shah Abdali, during his 26 years as ruler of Kashmir, was followed by his son Timur Shah who ruled for 20 years, followed by his son Zaman who ruled for a further eight years. Mahmud, his half

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brother, overthrew him and took over Kabul in 1801. Shuja, yet another half brother, dislodged him in 1803. The Afghan rule in Kashmir finally came to an end in 1819, with the conquest of Kashmir by the Sikhs.

What was their undoing was their obsession with consolidating their rule in the Punjab, and the constant internecine conflicts arising out of unsettled conditions in Afghanistan created by the powerful tribal clans who wanted to oust the Durranis and assert their own supremacy over their country. It did not help them either, that the Sikhs were fast establishing their military supremacy in the Punjab itself under Ranjit Singh, who in 1798 was appointed governor of Lahore by Zaman Shah. This followed on his realization that it would not be possible for an Afghan governor to maintain peace there. This step helped to establish Sikh power in the Punjab in fact, and in law.

The governors that the Afghan rulers appointed to Kashmir, as the rulers themselves, only viewed Kashmir as a rich source of revenue and tribute. Very few of them, with some exceptions, were interested in establishing a just system of government there. In Ahmed Shah Abdali's time alone, there were nine governors with Bomzai appointed on three occasions whenever Abdali found his governors getting out of hand. It was no better in the time of his sons Timur Shah or Zaman Shah or the others who followed them. Without exception they all had governors who used every possible means to extract the maximum revenue from the people. Greed and ruthless cruelty in exacting taxes reduced Kashmir to a state of wretched poverty. With people fleeing the atrocities directed against them—the Hindus and Pandits from the Muslims and the Shias from the Sunnis, and the rest of the

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general population suffering at the hands of the tax collectors, some of them Pandits—agricultural operations were virtually at a standstill and the economy in shambles.

The constant incursions by Afghan armies sent in to put down governors and their henchman defying the Afghan writ, created further panic and chaos. Famine was a frequent feature brought on by man-made conditions, and often precipitated by natural calamities such as floods, earthquakes and epidemics. The people of Kashmir faced appalling conditions and would have given anything to shake off the Afghan yoke. In Kashmir too, the Bombas from the neighbouring areas only awaited every opportunity to make incursions when the local officials were hard-pressed and weakened. At one point, the Raja of Jammu seized an opportune moment to attempt an unsuccessful invasion of Kashmir. The establishment of a princely state, in what was fast becoming British India, also added another dimension to the situation. Kashmir, with its strategic location on the north-western frontier in the corridor from Central Asia with the Tsarist Russia's influence beginning to make its presence felt there, also became another factor, as well as the rise of Napoleon in Europe, and his alliance in Persia.

The opportunity to shake off the Afghan yoke of misrule over Kashmir, which lasted for almost seven decades, presented itself when Birbal Dhar, an influential Kashmiri Pandit who was among those appointed by the Afghans to collect revenue, initiated it by leaving Kashmir stealthily with his son to venture initially to Jammu. There, he was well-received by Raja Gulab Singh, who sent him to Lahore with a letter of introduction to his brother Dhyan Singh in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Birbal Dhar

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was able to persuade the Maharaja to invade Kashmir. A force of 30,000 under Raja Gulab Singh was dispatched to Kashmir, with Birbal's son, Raj Kak, being held hostage in Ranjit Singh's court as a guarantee against the amount pledged by his father to the Maharaja in the event of the failure of the expedition. The first battle was at Pir Panjal, where the Afghans were defeated. The next decisive battle was fought at Shopian, where Jabbar Khan, the last Afghan governor, was wounded and his troops put to flight. As a result, Jabbar Khan also fled to Afghanistan. Kashmir fell to the Sikhs in 1819, bringing the five centuries of Muslim rule to an end. Raja Kak Dhar was honoured in Lahore, and Lahore celebrated the victory for three days.

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FOUR

A Century of Dogra Rule

"We use history to understand ourselves, and we ought to use it to understand others. We can never assume that we are all the same, and that is true in business and politics as it is in personal relations."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), p x

"History can help us to be wise; it can also suggest to us what the likely outcome of our actions might be.
Each historical event is a unique congeries of factors, people, or chronology. Yet, by examining the past, we can get some useful lessons about how to proceed and some warning about what is or is not likely to happen. We do have to be careful to cast our gaze as widely as possible."

Margaret MacMillan, *ibid,* p 171

4.1 Kashmir under the Sikhs

The people of Kashmir heaved a collective sigh of relief at their release from Afghan bondage by the Sikh army. The Pandits too were greatly beholden to Birbal Dhar for having risked his own life and that of his family to slip out of the Valley to seek the aid of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the great Sikh warrior and statesman and at that time, a force to reckon with in North India. He risked losing everything when he pledged to reimburse the amount

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the Maharaja incurred to send his army into Kashmir. Against possible failure of the venture, he left his son as hostage at the Lahore court to guarantee the same. He paid a heavy price when his uncle was no longer able to convince the Afghan governor of Kashmir that Birbal had not left the Valley. On learning of the escape of Birbal and his son, the Sirdar attempted to find his wife and daughter-in-law. On Birbal's departure from the Valley, they were given shelter in the home of a Muslim—Kudos Gojwari—arranged by a Pandit, Wasa Kak Harkarabashi. Though pressured by the Sirdar after paying a recurring fine of Rs 1,000 per day for nine days, Wasa Kak refused to oblige the governor by revealing their whereabouts. It was the son-in-law of Birbal, Tilak Chand Munshi, who betrayed the ladies, who were forthwith summoned to present themselves before the Sirdar at Shergarhi. Birbal's wife committed suicide rather than face dishonour, but his daughter-in-law was taken into custody and sent to Kabul. Wasa Kak Harkarabashi was put to death for not revealing their hideout. On his way out of Kashmir, Birbal himself had been aided by the Maliks who guarded the passes out of the Valley. They too paid the extreme price for having abetted in his escape. Where Muslims had come to the aid of the family, it speaks volumes that it was one of his own family members who had betrayed his mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law.

Though Raj Kak Dhar, the hostage son, was awarded a robe of honour by Ranjit Singh in the first flush of his victory over the Afghans, Birbal was penalized in the course of time. Despite his having remitted Rs 40 lakh to the Maharaja's treasury and being honoured for it, he fell prey to the intrigues of his jealous cousin, Ganesh Dhar, in the time of Hari Singh Nalwa. Having poisoned

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the governor's mind against him, Birbal was summoned to present himself before Ranjit Singh at Lahore, where he was dismissed and stripped off all his property. Though he was reinstated later under Dewan Moti Ram who followed Nalwa, differences arose between the two, and once again all Birbal's property was confiscated, and he was thrown into prison where he died. The fact that he was the one responsible for the addition of a most valuable asset, Kashmir, to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's kingdom, and that he had served him with dedication did not count.

When Ranjit Singh took over Kashmir, the vast majority of the population was Muslim. There were very few Hindus and Pandits since during the Afghan regime, vast numbers of them had migrated to the plains to settle there. According to Moorcroft, who had around that time travelled through Ladakh and Kashmir, the population of the Valley stood at around 8,00,000 though there had been no census taken during the Sikh rule. There was a larger urban population than the rural one, simply because vast numbers of the peasants had stopped cultivating the land and had also fled to the plains to escape the tyranny of the tax collectors. Of the urban population, the upper class irrespective of religion was constituted of the Sikh Sirdars (the wealthy business class), the Karkhanadars, and a few privileged Kashmiri Pandit families. The middle class in the urban areas were Kashmiri Pandits of modest means, while the lower classes constituted of the peasants, skilled and unskilled labourers. While Ranjit Singh himself was not bigoted, the same could not be said of his officers and soldiers, who as Sikhs had been brought up to hate the Muslims. They were merciless in their dealings with the poorer classes who were solely made up of Muslims, particularly in the rural areas. Though they did not indulge in the savage brutality of the Afghans, the

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Sikhs with their rough and ready ways were only slightly better than their predecessors.

Much depended on the administration of the particular governors at the time. There were good governors and there were bad ones. There were those who were preoccupied with punitive military expeditions, and had little time to see to good governance. It also mattered that as long as Ranjit Singh was alive and well, there was a measure of control to the extent that he recalled inefficient or erring ones and replaced them. However, as he grew older and feeble, and the British and the Raja of Jammu extended their influence and interest to Kashmir, things got much worse.

A devastating earthquake in 1827, and the worst famine to grip Kashmir in 1832 only served to make matters worse for the people. Besides, holding on to Afghanistan became an increasingly difficult and expensive proposition for the Sikhs, even though they had a sizeable force stationed there. The tribes there were constantly rising up in arms against them. Also the fact that Ranjit Singh had subjugated several Muslim chieftains did not go down well with them. This was particularly so in the case of traditionally Muslim areas such as Peshawar and Hazara. A zealot, Sayyid Ahmed Shah, with a band of followers set out on a mission to reassert Muslim authority over these areas. With the help of Afghan tribesmen who flocked to his side, he was able to drive the Sikh forces out of Peshawar. However his band of Indian followers was not welcome there and without his tribal allies he could not hold on to Peshawar, which was retaken by Sher Singh and the governor of Kashmir. The Sayyid was taken by surprise at Balakot, and he was killed in the encounter.

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The uncertain conditions on his frontiers, and the need to maintain control required heavy deployment of Sikh troops in the hilly districts, and there was an increase in financial outlay. To this end, heavier taxes were levied on the Kashmiris and there was a constant demand for *begar* to supply the troops in the outlying areas. The famine of 1832 was brought on by the need to keep troops well supplied, which resulted in severe scarcity of food in the entire Valley. It was aggravated by an early snowfall before the rice crop was harvested. The resulting deaths from starvation in the Valley reduced the population drastically. Thousands more migrated to the Punjab. The governor, Prince Sher Singh, might have helped the situation by importing food grains from outside the Valley, but failed to do so. He also failed to get hoarders to release grain for sale at reasonable prices. This resulted in his recall to Lahore and the appointment of Colonel Mian Singh in his place.

The 'Colonel' as he was known, though a veteran soldier, was a compassionate man who was deeply disturbed by the distress of the people. He set to work to help them by importing grain and eggs from the Punjab. To restore the numbers in the dwindling population, he withdrew the tax on marriages. Revenue reforms were also instituted so that any advances for agriculture were made free of interest; the state took only half the produce; the middlemen cheating the peasants were punished; and proper weights were introduced. Colonel Mian Singh succeeded in winning over the people by helping to restore a measure of prosperity in their lives.

This was the time when several Europeans visited Kashmir in the guise of missionaries and scientists but in reality, to assess the situation on the ground for the British to move into these

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territories. They were constantly conspiring with rebellious elements in an attempt to oust Ranjit Singh from this strategic region that bordered on Tsarist Russia and the Chinese empire. In 1835, Amir Dost Mohamed, who ruled part of Afghanistan, launched the first of several attacks over two years. This resulted in the siege of not only the fortress of Jamrod, but also the death of Ranjit Singh's General, Hari Singh Nalwa, in action. The Sikh garrison held onto the fort until they were relieved by a huge force sent from Lahore, which drove the Afghans away from the Peshawar Valley.

Kashmir too had its share of troubles when Sikh soldiers, who were used to making revenue collections from the peasants, were kept in check by Colonel Mian Singh. This was happening because their pay had run into arrears. This caused great resentment among them. Taking advantage of the instability at Lahore, following the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839, the army in Kashmir mutinied and a few soldiers killed Colonel Mian Singh at night in his bedroom in 1841. With his death, the people of the Valley lost a good and just governor, and they mourned his loss deeply.

In order to restore Sikh authority in the Valley, Maharaja Sher Singh who had succeeded his father, sent in a strong force under Raja Gulab Singh, the Jammu ruler. The mutinous soldiers were put down in 1842, and a new governor, Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din took charge. Another person taking advantage of the chaotic conditions there was Raja Gulab Singh who had been installed as ruler of Jammu by Ranjit Singh himself. His ambitions to extend Jammu's territories beyond its original limits had been fulfilled by his lieutenant Wazir Zorawar Singh

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by successfully adding Skardu and the whole of the upper Indus Valley to it. He had also exacted some concessions from the earlier governor of Kashmir, Mian Singh. Ladakh and Garo were also taken and he was emboldened to attempt an invasion of Tibet. However he was prevented from doing so by a premature snowfall and bitter cold, which hit his Dogra forces hard. Zorawar Singh himself lost his life but he had already secured the whole of Ladakh by means of a treaty endorsed by both the Chinese and Tibetan governments. Raja Gulab Singh was now only biding his time to annex the Kashmir Valley as well to his kingdom. Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din's appointment as governor helped him do so.

In 1843, the Bombas—ever ready to take advantage of any weakening of the Kashmir government—attempted to free their leader, Zabardast Khan, who was imprisoned in Srinagar. Sher Ahmed, a daring leader of the Bombas, attacked and defeated the Sikh garrison at Kahori. After ravaging the countryside, he set out to take Kashmir. The Kashmir forces under the governor's son, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, met him in battle at Shilal, but were defeated and the Sikh forces had to retreat in the wake of severe snowfall. Zabardast Khan had to be released to Sher Ahmed.

In his time as governor, Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din did much to win over the Kashmiris. As a first step, the Jama Masjid that had been closed since 1819, when the Sikhs first took over from the Afghans, was reopened for worship. He also repaired the Shankaracharya temple on the hill overlooking the city, and installed a new lingam there. He also restored *jagirs* and cash grants to scholars that had been resumed by earlier governors. The government sold its stock of grain at reduced rates, forcing

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traders to reduce their rates. Thus he was able to continue the good work started by his predecessor. Had it not been for the instability of the Sikh government at Lahore, the disaffection of their army, and the growing trouble being fomented by the British, he might have been able to achieve greater success. Gulab Singh's growing power and expanding territories were an added cause of concern and alarm for him until his death in 1845.

His son Sheikh Imam-ud-din succeeded him as governor. Well educated and intelligent like his father, he might have made another good governor, but for the rapidly changing situation at Lahore, the seat of the Sikh government. This made it increasingly difficult to maintain effective control over Kashmir. The Sikh soldiers were becoming ever more uncontrollable. The scramble for the Lahore throne between various claimants only resulted in chaos and anarchy. There were murders and frequent changes of rulers resulting in a very unsettled situation in the Punjab. At this point, the British found the right opportunity to take on the weakened Sikh kingdom. Rani Jindan Kaur, Ranjit Singh's widow, was regent to the minor prince Duleep Singh.

The British army arrayed itself against the Sikhs on the banks of the Sutlej, and the Rani ordered the troops to march on them. Several fierce battles later and the defeat of the Sikhs, culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Lahore between the British and the Sikh government. In 1846, the British transferred the territories ceded by the Sikhs to them to the Dogra ruler, Gulab Singh and his heirs. Thus Kashmir and all the territories east of the Indus and west of the Ravi passed into his hands bringing to an end the Sikh rule in Kashmir.

If the purpose of this history is to understand how the Kashmiri Pandits fared through various regimes that ruled

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over them, then the Sikh rule should have provided them with a welcome change from the discrimination, harassment and persecution that they had endured in earlier centuries on account of their religion. And yet, despite five centuries of earlier Muslim rule by foreign rulers, there had been periods of good times under some of them. Most notable was the long and benevolent rule of 'Bad Shah' Zain-ul-abidin, remembered through all time since then for his just and equitable treatment of all his subjects, Muslim and Hindu alike. The fact that he earnestly strove to undo the harm done to the Pandits by Sikander 'But Shikan' by inviting back to the Valley the families that had survived by fleeing the earlier terror is forever to his credit. So too is his recognition of the capabilities of the community, and their value in running the administration, by appointing them to responsible posts in his government.

The Sikh rulers and their governors were better soldiers than administrators, and they could have benefited from having Pandits help them rule their own country. Instead it is seen that only a few privileged families amongst them dominated the scene as revenue collectors, and were harshly penalized for failing to achieve targets set for them. The urban middle classes at the time included a majority of Pandits of modest means who depended on their education to work as petty officials and scribes. It is a matter of record that the Sikh rulers, driven by their need to meet their escalating expenditure on their military campaigns, were relentless in imposing ever more taxes on the population, just as the Afghans had done before them. That situation did not leave the middle classes in a very comfortable position, especially in times of famine and natural calamities such as floods, earthquakes and severe winters of which there

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was no dearth in that time. The earlier Afghan regime had bled the population white, and the Sikh era might have been a time of slow but steady recovery of the economy. However there were few governors who even attempted to do the needful to help people recover, and the few reforms made came too late in their short tenure in Kashmir to be of any appreciable help.

Little is known from the historical records of the condition of Kashmiri Pandit women of these times. What is known from the Afghan times is that there had been mass exoduses of the community to escape the terror unleashed on them. Significant is the fact of the abduction of Kashmiri Pandit women to be sent back to Afghanistan. If Birbal's daughter-in-law could not escape such a fate, one can only imagine the fate of women of lesser families. This was a time when Kashmiri Pandits adopted the Purdah system and kept their women closely cloistered. Even Muslim women of the working class preferred to be unkempt to render themselves less attractive. Any good looking woman was fair game for the Afghans. There is little known of how Pandit women fared in this respect during the Sikh rule before the Dogras took over from them, and their century of rule over Kashmir presaged the most significant time in the entire history of Kashmir.

4.2 Dogra Rule

4.2a Maharaja Gulab Singh

Maharaja Gulab Singh, founder of the Dogra dynasty, has the distinction of being the founder of the state of Jammu and

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Kashmir, as it existed in 1948 prior to the Partition of India. The state then, starting from the Karakoram and the Himalayan ranges that formed its natural northern borders, included Ladakh, its largest district; the dependencies of Baltistan, Gilgit, Hunza and Nagar; the Valley of Kashmir; the province of Jammu extending on its southern limits as far as Sialkot in the Punjab; and on the west, including the Poonch and Rajouri districts that also abutted on Punjab.

From very small beginnings as the son of a *jagirdar* Mian Kishore Singh, Gulab Singh rose to the position of the only ruler to build a state for himself out of the kingdom that the Sikhs had carved out for themselves in the strategic north-west of India. He was able to achieve this by sheer dint of his own brilliant efforts and diplomacy. Born in 1792, he was brought up by his grandfather who trained him well in the skills that served him well in his life—expert horsemanship and a deadly skill with the sword and at marksmanship.

He started out in life at the age of sixteen, when he took up service under another *jagirdar* with whom he went to the Sikh court at Lahore. It was there that his martial skills caught the eye of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who took him under his own service in 1809. This was the year that Ranjit Singh had signed the Treaty of Amritsar with the British. Following this, Ranjit Singh took him on his campaigns against the Afghans, and this was where he distinguished himself as a fearless warrior and a leader of his regiment. His courage in 1814, in bringing back his own regiment from the ill-fated expedition against the Afghan governor of Kashmir, Fateh Khan, earned him a *jagir*. The siege of Jallandhar brought him more *jagirs* as rewards.

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What is important is that in 1803, Maharaja Ranjit Singh annexed the province of Jammu to the Sikh kingdom. Jammu itself had gained its freedom from the crumbling Mughal Empire under the leadership of Raja Ranjit Dev, a Dogra prince of Sangram Dev's line. It might be worthwhile to step back a little in history to trace the emergence of the state.

Jammu history goes back to the epic and Puranic periods. The Dogras as a people derived their name from the corrupted form of the Sanskrit term *Dogirath*, meaning 'two lakes'. These lakes, the Manasar and the Suransar, lie to the east of the city of Jammu. The city going back to those ancient times is located on a hillock in the first range of hills rising from the plains. Bounded at its foot, the river Tawi meanders down from the foothills. Originally the Jammu province was a collection of small Dogra fiefdoms of which Jammu was the most important.

In medieval history, we find the first mention of Jammu when Timur passed this area in 1398 during his invasion of India. The Jammu chiefs, who until then had been mostly engaged in feuding among themselves, rallied together to meet Timur's challenge. This only resulted in their being driven to retreat into the hills beyond. During the Mughal era, the Jammu chieftains were subject to their overlordship. However, considering the distance from the Mughal capital, they were left to themselves to manage their small fiefdoms.

By 1760, following Raja Ranjit Dev's ascent to the Jammu *gaddi* in 1750, he had succeeded in putting Jammu on the political map of North India. He had taken advantage of the decline of the Mughal Empire, the repeated assaults on it by Ahmed Shah Abdali, and the general chaos prevailing in the

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Punjab and adjoining areas to gain control over all the hill states situated between the Chenab and the Ravi, and some to the west of the Chenab as well. In the south, his kingdom extended up to Sialkot. With a view to building for himself an independent kingdom, he allied himself with Abdali against Raja Sukh Jiwan Mal, governor of Kashmir, and was rewarded with a *jagir*.

In the 31 years of his rule, he had succeeded in establishing Jammu as an important commercial centre on the trade route between the Kashmir Valley, Afghanistan and Central Asia. His orderly and peaceful kingdom attracted investors and bankers from Lahore and Delhi. George Foster, in 1783, particularly mentions Ranjit Dev's special concessions to Muslim traders whom he encouraged to settle in Jammu by assigning a separate quarter of the city to them and building a mosque in the new settlement. Through these astute measures, he was able to bring Jammu an importance and prosperity that it had never known until then. Unfortunately, towards the end of his reign in 1780 with the rise of the Sikh *misls* in the Punjab, he had to face a strong force led by one of the leaders of the Bhangi *misl*, who retired from the field only after he had extracted a tribute from him.

In 1779, falling prey to the persuasions of the Kanth family, the Bomba and Khaka chiefs to help them overthrow the tyrannical rule of the Afghan, Karim Dad, Ranjit Dev had attempted to invade Kashmir while Karim Dad was away at Skardu. However, on receiving information about the impending attack, his force was ambushed and forced to retreat.

Undecided about passing on his kingdom to his dissolute elder son, he nominated his younger son, Dalil Singh, to succeed

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him. This led to a struggle between the brothers, with Brij Raj (the older one) seeking the aid of the Sukarchakia *misl* and his brother that of the rival Bhangi one. The leaders of both the *misls* were killed in the action and the rivals withdrew from Jammu. After Ranjit Dev's death, Brij Raj was unable to hold out against the growing power of the Sikhs. Mahan Singh of the Sukarchakia *misl* was now their leader. Befriending Brij Raj at first, he hoped to regain some of the territories he had lost to the Bhangi *misl*. In the convoluted alliances, with the Kanheyas entering the scene, both Mahan Singh and Brij Raj Dev were defeated and ended up paying tribute. A few months later, abandoning Brij Raj Dev and allying himself with the Kanheyas, Mahan Singh attacked and sacked Jammu leaving with a great deal of loot. Brij Raj Dev paid an annual tribute of Rs 50,000 to him. Though Brij Raj continued to hold Jammu, he lost control over the far-flung hilly districts that had earlier been part of his kingdom. Following his death, he was succeeded by his year-old son, Sampuran Singh, under the guardianship of a cousin, Mian Mota. However, his son died at the age of eleven and was followed by Jit Singh, Dalil Singh's son.

Jit Singh proved to be an incapable ruler, whose wife, an ambitious woman, took over control. In 1803, Maharaja Ranjit Singh watched the unfolding scene from the sidelines and took advantage of the internal dissensions, to send in his army under Hukam Singh to annex Jammu to his kingdom. It remained with the Sikhs for only twelve years before Raja Gulab Singh took it again, not by force, but by subtle manipulation and diplomacy.

How that came about serves to highlight his ability to assess the situation, and use it to cleverly consolidate his own position

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at Ranjit Singh's court, and in his confidence. His bravery in the field in the most difficult situations had been demonstrated to the ruler time and again, especially after he retrieved the dead body of one of Ranjit's favourites from the battlefield at Multan. He thus became one of Ranjit Singh's most trusted generals. His brother, Dhyan Singh, had also gained the confidence of the Sikh ruler and had risen to the post of Dewan at the Lahore court.

When Ranjit annexed Jammu, at a time when the Sikh forces were being terrorized by a local chief, Mian Dido, and after several expeditions against him had failed, Gulab Singh took over the task of putting an end to the trouble. He first ensured that the local support received by the rebel was stopped, by punishing his supporters severely. He then proceeded to corner him by driving him up a hill, where he was surrounded and killed.

This convinced Ranjit Singh that Gulab Singh was the best person to handle the difficult province. In 1820, the latter was entrusted with the administration of Jammu province, with the task of collecting the revenues. By claiming that it would not be possible to do so without the use of force, he was permitted to maintain an army and was awarded the title of Raja.

In 1821, Gulab Singh added Kishtwar to his territory. He did not need to use force, but by creating distrust between the ruler and his minister, he was able to force the latter to flee to Bhadrawah, allowing for the easy takeover of the area. Ranjit Singh entrusted him with the task of taking over Rajouri to the west of his province. The local Muslim Raja had played a treacherous role in his earlier attempt to invade Kashmir, and there was an old score to settle. Gulab Singh successfully undertook this mission and captured the Raja. For the services

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rendered to the Sikh state, he was rewarded by Maharaja Ranjit Singh with the grant to him and his heirs of the title of Raja and the territory of Jammu province. The formal ceremony of *raj tilak* was presided over by Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself.

Once installed at Jammu, Gulab Singh was sure that his brother Dhyan Singh would look to his interests at the Lahore court, and thus preferred to base himself at Jammu where his presence ensured order. He was also in a position to personally supervise the collection of revenues. In this he proved to be a wiser ruler than his predecessors who had been proxy rulers through their governors or their agents, who had used harsh methods to exact the maximum from the peasants. He was able to restore stability to the province, and thus help in its progress towards prosperity.

Growth was ensured through the expeditions that he planned to important frontier regions like Ladakh and Baltistan, which were successfully executed by his intrepid general Zorawar Singh. His earlier conquest of Kishtwar had helped him build an army capable of mountain warfare. Gulab Singh must have also been aware of the growing interest of the British India government in these strategic areas located close to both the Russian and Chinese empires, and the threats posed by them. In 1834, prior to his attack on Ladakh, he had in confidence sought the clearance of the Company for this venture and on receiving their permission, went ahead with it. Under Zorawar Singh, a well-equipped force set out for Ladakh through Kishtwar.

The first battle fought was at Pashkum, where the Ladakhi forces were defeated. Regrouping, and with a force of 5,000, they faced the Dogras again between Kargil and Suru. Confronted by them, the Ladakhis fled and were followed up to Leh. The

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Ladakhi ruler made a frantic appeal for help to the British through an English traveller, Henderson, but was turned down by them when Ranjit Singh, Zorawar Singh's overlord, made a strong protest. The result was that the Gyalpo was forced to surrender and pay an indemnity of Rs 50,000 and an annual tribute of Rs 20,000 to Gulab Singh.

Following the defeat of Ladakh, Zorawar Singh turned his attention to Baltistan, in response to an appeal to him from one of the sons of the ruler there who had been deprived of his right to succession. In a brilliant pincer movement, with the Ladakhis under their own general at the Chorpat Pass and Khapalu, and the Dogra army led by himself through Dras and the Indus Valley, the Balti forces were surrounded. The fort was besieged for a fortnight, and their water supply cut off resulting in their surrender. The ruler was deposed and replaced by the aggrieved son who had earlier been deprived of his right to succeed.

Gulab Singh's earlier successes in Ladakh and Baltistan were the cause of envy and alarm in both the Sikh and British ranks, especially after the Sikh governor of Kashmir was forced by Gulab Singh into making concessions to him in the midst of the growing confusion and chaos at the Lahore court. Skardu and the entire Valley of the Indus were left unguarded before Gulab Singh's forces. Emboldened by his successes in Kishtwar, Ladakh and Baltistan, Zorawar Singh embarked on an even bolder venture into Tibet with the British powerless to do anything to stop him. This created even greater panic at their Calcutta headquarters.

A strong protest was lodged by them at the Lahore court, demanding that the Dogras vacate all the territories they had taken. The excuse was that the Chinese government would object

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to it. A British officer was sent to ensure that Zorawar Singh would comply, but before he could be reached, the Dogras had been defeated; he himself had been killed in the action and only 25 soldiers survived to return to Jammu with the news of the disaster. Zorawar Singh had grossly underestimated the fighting qualities of the Tibetans under the command of their veteran general, Shatra.

The odds in any case had been stacked against the Dogras. They were unaccustomed to the high altitudes and the extreme severity of the cold to which the locals were acclimatized. Also surprisingly, the poor strategy adopted by their general in sending out only small detachments to fight the Tibetans, resulted in their being ruthlessly cut down by them. Though Zorawar Singh himself fought valiantly beside his men, he was first wounded with gunshot, and then killed with a spear thrust. Those who were taken prisoner were treated well at Lhasa except for a single Muslim who had been in the forefront of the desecration of monasteries early in the Dogra offensive.

In the wake of their defeat in Tibet, Ladakh too was lost by the Dogras. However, this failed to daunt Gulab Singh. Intent on regaining Ladakh, he sent in a force of 6,000 under two high-ranking Dogras—Diwan Hari Chand and Wazir Ratnu—in the very next year. Maharaja Gulab Singh established his headquarters at Nasim Bagh on the outskirts of Srinagar even though the Valley itself had not been ceded to him and he was merely directing operations on behalf of the Sikh government.

The Dogra force had its first encounter with the Tibetans at Skardu from where the latter fared very badly and their commanders, Acchanjut and Karam Shah, were taken prisoner

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and brought to Srinagar. There they were compelled to negotiate and sign a treaty. The terms of the treaty restored Ladakh to Gulab Singh and the boundaries of Tibet and Ladakh were demarcated. It also permitted trade between the two countries on a reciprocal basis. However, the treaty did not ensure peace in the areas that were occupied. Until much later, the Tibetans continued to create trouble for the Dogras with some considerable support from the British, who preferred to hold those territories themselves.

There were frequent British and foreign travellers to Ladakh following this, on one pretext or the other, but essentially to negotiate with the Ladakhi king in the hope of gaining a foothold and building a fort there. However, the king refused to permit this and rejected an offer by the British. They were also there to survey the region and also to keep a watchful eye on what was transpiring on the other side of the Karakorams. These visitors were not welcome in Ladakh for very long by Gulab Singh. He annexed Ladakh and Baltistan, and this placed him in a very advantageous position vis-à-vis the control of the wool trade on which the economy of Kashmir depended. It had long been his dream to include Kashmir in his territories and the opportunity was being offered to him now.

In 1841, the Sikh Governor Mian Singh was assassinated and Gulab Singh was sent to deal with the mutinous troops who were responsible for the murder. After doing so, he became the virtual ruler of Kashmir and appointed his own man, Ghulam Mohi-ud-din, as governor. This was his first step towards becoming de facto ruler. By the time of Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, he and his brothers, Dhyan Singh and Suchet Singh, had very well

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established their influence and control at the Lahore court. Dhyan Singh had long been the Dewan there; Suchet Singh commanded a large Sikh force and Gulab Singh was firmly in control of the Dogra territories flanking Punjab.

With the rival claimants to the throne of Lahore vying with each other, the brothers did not help improve matters; rather, they played an active role in removing some of them. They arranged a compromise between the last two among them, and thereafter, Gulab Singh returned to Jammu to administer his own territories. He was soon called to aid the British forces at Jalalabad in Afghanistan. He was glad to do so because, an astute statesman that he was, he realized that he needed the British on his side if he wanted to retain his own position as an independent ruler of Jammu, after the foreseeable break up of the Sikh kingdom.

Rani Chand Kaur died in 1842, and the Lahore court once again descended into disorder. Sher Singh, now without any rivals to the throne, grew restless under Dhyan Singh. In the meanwhile those opposed to both Dhyan Singh and Sher Singh attempted to create a rift between the two. Subsequently, both were killed. Suchet Singh attempting to avenge his brother's death was the next target and he too was assassinated. Rani Jindan Kaur and her lover Lal Singh now controlled the Lahore government. They attempted to rid themselves of Gulab Singh as well, and sent a force against him. He was captured and imprisoned at Lahore. He was rescued by his loyal troops and was able to affect an escape to Jammu, from where he decided to watch the fast unfolding situation at Lahore.

The Rani now threw in her forces into battle against the British. Though she asked Gulab Singh to lead her forces, he

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refused at first, citing the murder of his brothers and nephews at the Sikh court. However, as the tide of battle turned against the Sikh forces, he decided to go to their rescue, and to negotiate with them before disaster struck them. Though for all practical purposes, the British were victorious at the battle of Sobrason in 1846, they had suffered heavy losses in men and were ready to negotiate a peace. They also realized the value of keeping Gulab Singh on their side, as he was a formidable force to have against them. With that in view, they decided with one master stroke to include a clause in the Treaty of Lahore that they signed, whereby they granted all the hilly tracts east of the river Indus and west of the river Ravi, including Chamba, to Gulab Singh and his heirs. In consideration of this grant, they required a payment of Rs 75 lakh in lieu of the amount owing to them by the Sikh state. By this act they also succeeded in severely curtailing and weakening the Sikh state that had until then been too strong for them. Gulab Singh thus became the ruler of not merely Jammu but Kashmir as well, paving the way for the creation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

A separate treaty to this effect was signed between Gulab Singh and the British Indian government endorsing this clause on 16 March 1846. No doubt the British rued their decision to hand over Kashmir to him after it had been won at such hard fought expense. It seemed that in making that hasty decision all they had wanted at the time was to weaken the Sikh state, little realizing that they had let it go for what their critics termed a 'paltry sum'. For them this realization came too late as Gulab Singh had strengthened his position considerably in an area of strategic importance to them. Thereafter they used every means

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to prevent him from further consolidating his position by reforms and reorganization of the chaotic state. In subsequent years, they also resorted to subterfuge in order to pressurize him and his heirs to secure a foothold in the state and a say in its administration.

The territories that had been ceded to him were in a very sorry condition in every respect. The Afghan rule had already left the Valley and its people economically ruined. During the Sikh rule, though the shawl trade was booming, the weavers themselves had been taxed to the point of making their very survival difficult. Agriculture, the other mainstay of the economy, had suffered similarly with the mass exodus of the peasants to the plains to escape the demands of the revenue collectors, and the extortions of the Sikh soldiers. The famines of 1832 and 1838 had taken their toll of the population, which had been drastically reduced.

As if these conditions were not bad enough, the people were at the mercy of the depredations of the Bomba and Khaka tribes, which periodically raided and looted the Valley. The Galawans, a criminal tribe, were another lot who preyed on them. In the last days of the Sikh rule, the administration was incapable of maintaining law and order, and dealing with any lawless elements who were free to harass the people. Thus, Gulab Singh faced many tasks when he finally realized his dream of taking over Kashmir.

In order to bring about some semblance of stability and prosperity to his newly-acquired possession, despite failing health, he set to work to remedy the situation. Establishing law and order was his first priority. He launched a campaign against all those responsible. The Galawans were captured and dealt with

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severely; they were hanged and their corpses left hanging on the gallows as a warning to those who broke the law. The Bombas and Khakas were driven out of the Valley and the passes into the Valley were reinforced with garrisons at the forts. The outcome was that with order restored, trade and commerce, on which the Kashmir economy depended, started to improve.

Next, he turned his attention to improving the lot of the peasants. He resumed the newly-granted *jagirs*, and the unregistered ones with the *Dharmarth*. He also reorganized the revenue and police administrations creating four *wazarats*. Responsible and trusted officials were put in charge of important departments to discourage corrupt practices.

Begar or forced labour—the bane of the people until then—which had reduced them to virtual slaves of the system, was reformed. To stop exploitation, each village was allowed to designate a set number of those who volunteered and these were offered incentives in the form of rice, and free rations when the government called on them to work. An officer was appointed to supervise the arrangements.

Rationing of rice for city dwellers was another important reform. The Maharaja introduced a strict monopoly of rice, which was then sold at fixed prices to the people. This helped to prevent the hoarding of grain by unscrupulous traders against times of famine, for sale at usurious prices. With the shawl industry—the mainstay of the economy—he needed to do his best to reform the system. The rich Karkhanadars who owned the establishments had made their profits by putting the burden of the taxes on the weavers. Each loom was taxed whether or not in use. The weavers themselves were in virtual bondage to the owners, so that

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they could not seek employment elsewhere. Apprenticed at an early age, their value grew once they were skilled in weaving. To ensure that they were not lured away by another Karkhanadar, the law forbade them from luring weavers away from their original employers. They were further exploited by their owner who sold them the *shali* at prices higher than that in the market.

In 1846, Sheikh Imam-ud-din, the last Sikh governor, had also attempted to give the weavers some relief by releasing them from their bondage and by reducing the price of *shali* sold to them. When Gulab Singh took over the state, there were 11,000 looms in operation and 27,000 weavers. Despite the concessions made by the former governor, the owners had managed to circumvent them and keep them in continued bondage. In protest, in 1847, the weavers went on strike en masse, and sought the Maharaja's permission to migrate to the Punjab. Realizing the gravity of the situation, the Maharaja met with their leaders and having heard their grievances, issued orders to reform the system. The result was that the weaver was no longer a bonded worker but could change jobs at will. He only paid taxes on the shawls he actually produced, not as in earlier times, when he did not even use the loom.

Gulab Singh, despite his efforts to improve the lot of the Kashmiris with reforms and the reorganization of the administration, had no respite from the attempts of the British to interfere in it. Though he treated visiting British dignitaries with the greatest respect and hospitality, he was constantly being criticized by them on his management of the state's affairs. Efforts were made to turn his Muslim subjects against him but these were subverted by his Pandit minister Dhar. The basic intent

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was to find just about any excuse to have a British Resident installed at Srinagar. The first of the visitors to the Valley was Lord Hardinge in 1846, followed by George Taylor and Henry Montgomery Lawrence. Fortunately for the Maharaja, who welcomed and often acted on constructive criticism offered by his English friends, the outbreak of the second Sikh war diverted the attention of the British, and for a little while there was a letup of the pressure tactics.

After things quietened down in the Punjab, there was a spate of foreign visitors to the Valley. This was used as an excuse in 1851 to suggest that a Resident be appointed to Srinagar to look after the interests of the visitors. The Maharaja, who had opposed the proposal initially, had to relent and consent to the presence of a Resident at Srinagar, supposedly to ensure "the return of visitors in order to put a stop to certain excesses committed by some of them"[12].

Gulab Singh had to face trouble on his northern frontiers as well. Under the terms of his treaty with the British, apart from the territories transferred to him, he was given the freedom to explore the possibility of extending his territory to Gilgit, which had been under the Sikhs since 1841. The declining power of the Sikh state had made the position of their governor, Nathu Singh, untenable. Following Gulab Singh's acquisition of Kashmir, he transferred his loyalty to the Dogra ruler, and was allowed to continue as governor there. However, the frontier clan chieftains, resenting Gulab Singh's control of their region, rose against him, and Nathu Singh was murdered. This required the despatch of troops to reinforce those already there and to put down the rebel chief Gaur Khan. Two of Gulab Singh's

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officers—Bhup Singh and Sant Singh—took charge of Gilgit and ran the administration well. In 1851, Bhup Singh and a troop of 1,500 men were lured into an ambush by Gaur Khan's sons. Most of them were killed and the rest taken prisoner. Only one Gurkha woman survived to report the debacle. Sant Singh met a similar fate and Gulab Singh lost control of Gilgit.

The same year, Chilasi tribesmen entered the Astore Valley and enslaved a large number of people. In 1852, a Dogra force was sent to deal with them, but met with stiff resistance in their siege of Chilas. Two of their commanders were badly wounded. Supplies sent up to them from Srinagar were soon exhausted, but the Dogras persisted in their siege until the besieged Chilasis had depleted their own supplies, and were forced to sue for peace. Their leaders were brought to Srinagar where they accepted Gulab Singh's overlordship and returned to Chilas leaving their sons behind as hostages.

The British made one more attempt to undermine his position towards the end of his life, by encouraging one of his nephews Jawahar Singh to revolt against him and lay claim to half his kingdom, with an appeal to the British at Lahore. The Maharaja as was his wont, sent in a strong force against him. However, the British on learning that Jawahar Singh had been in correspondence with the Afghans took action against him and he was interned at Ambala and all his property confiscated. Gulab Singh was himself saved from further intrigues by the British by the onset of the Mutiny. Knowing that his own fortunes depended on their goodwill, he sent his son, Maharaja Ranbir Singh, whom he had in the meanwhile installed as ruler, to their aid. He went with a large force to help them with the siege of

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Delhi, but he himself had to return to his state on the death of Gulab Singh in 1857.

After Kashmir passed into the hands of the Dogras through Maharaja Gulab Singh's military and political efforts, for the first time after more than five centuries, a Hindu dynasty ruled over the Valley. With his earnest efforts, despite interference and preoccupation with dealing with other exigencies, he was able to restore a measure of stability and gain the confidence of even his Muslim subjects. The Pandits, though a minority, were a significant one that were part of the urban middle class and mainly because of their education and knowledge of Persia—the language of officialdom—they were ensured a place in the administration. We know that a few elitist Pandit families by virtue of their wealth, power and influence, had been close to the rulers of Kashmir, and had held important positions not merely during the Sikh rule, but earlier still in the Afghan period as well.

Gulab Singh's most significant achievement was that he had been able to establish a kingdom which stretched to its natural geographic boundaries and was very strategically placed on the map of India. From his very humble beginnings as the scion of a small fiefdom in the Dogra country, he had brought under his control a vast state by astutely manoeuvring and using every opportunity that presented itself to him. From being a Raja in the Dogra country, he had risen to be Maharaja of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, a territory that embraced several geographically-diverse regions, ethnic groups, religions and cultures. More importantly, he had tried to be fair and just with all of them, realizing that his own interests and those of

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his dynasty were dependent on the welfare and prosperity of his people and his state.

He was also not a ruler by proxy, as many of his predecessors had been, but had his finger on the pulse of events. With his presence on the spot, he was able to deal with whatever problems cropped up. Towards the end of his life, in spite of his failing health, he did everything possible to allay the concerns of his people. He was accessible to them, despite the accusations of greed for the *nazarana* that ensured an audience with him. From his perspective, he was only recovering what he had invested in money, men and his own efforts in acquiring those territories.

As a devout Hindu, he forbade the slaughter of cows in the state, and established the Dharmarth Trust to oversee the affairs of the temples in Jammu and Srinagar, including several new ones that he built. He was also responsible for building the new township at Purmandal, not far from Jammu.

Starting out as a soldier, he also understood the value of maintaining a strong, experienced, disciplined and loyal army to keep his state secure from both internal and external threats. With his only heir installed as ruler in his own lifetime, he was able to effect a smooth transition after his own death. In Maharaja Ranbir Singh, he left a ruler secure on the throne.

4.2b Maharaja Ranbir Singh

Maharaja Ranbir Singh was 28 years old when he succeeded his father. In his father's lifetime, he had already spent years with him as a soldier, and had assisted him earlier in administering Jammu province. As such, he came to the throne with enough experience to deal with the state as a whole on his father's death.

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It also certainly helped him that he did not have to deal with rival claimants and the ensuing chaos that was typical of less smooth transfers of power, as had been witnessed in the Punjab after Ranjit Singh's demise. The fact that on being installed on the throne in 1856 in his father's lifetime, he had received the blessings of the British administration that had earlier granted the territories to his father also helped him. He was therefore in a better position than his father had been, to continue to work for the economic betterment of the people and the state.

Though he himself was committed to their purpose, the bureaucracy through whom he had to implement his plans still had the old mindsets and ways of working, on exploiting the people to the maximum in order to fill the ruler's treasury as well as lining their own pockets.

The land tenure system and revenue collection system were in dire need of reform. Ranbir Singh's first attempt to improve them was to assess land revenue at a fixed rate. This should have given the tillers much relief, but the fertile brains of the collectors found the means to use even this reform to extract and embezzle from the collected funds from the peasants. The Maharaja, on learning of this, toured the Valley, compelling revenue officials to return money so collected, thus assuring the cultivators that he was eager to help them. He himself was very popular with his subjects, but his officials let him down at every turn by continuing to harass and exploit them. They continued to lack the incentives to cultivate the land as they themselves were left with barely enough to live on.

In agriculture, a number of new cash crops were introduced such as vines and hops. The silk industry was built up with the

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import of silkworms from China and growing of mulberry trees, and the laying out of tea gardens added a valuable cash crop.

Ranbir Singh continued to reform the administration setup that had been started by his father. He set up three departments—the military, civil and revenue. New subdivisions were set up under the civil and revenue department. The judicial system was reorganized and a Penal Code put in place similar to that in operation in British India. Appeal Courts were set up in Srinagar and Jammu with nearly 30 subordinate courts under them. The Maharaja himself heard cases for which the stamp duty was merely half a rupee. Where needed, he referred the case to a magistrate to investigate. The crime rate was low, for people still remembered the severe punishments given in Gulab Singh's time. In Drew's diaries, he writes of the Maharaja "so liked by the people and so conducive of good relations between rulers and subjects, used to sit in daily public Durbar in full view of his people receiving and answering his people's petitions"[12].

In order to improve trade and commerce, he also set about constructing new roads and repairing existing ones to improve the connectivity within the state and outside. Jammu and the Valley were connected, as well as Srinagar and the rest of India. To improve communications, a telegraph and postal system was inaugurated.

Realizing the importance to the state of the shawl industry, he paid special attention to it. Pandit Raj Kak Dhar headed this department and was expected to collect and remit revenue of Rs 12 lakh to the state treasury. The weavers however were still being exploited to an intolerable extent by the Karkhanadars,

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despite the reforms put in place in Gulab Singh's time. Barely subsisting on three rupees a month after taxes exacted from them, the weavers got together to present their petition for relief to the governor. Raj Kak twisted this fact to convince him that the procession was out to attack and kill him. A company of soldiers was sent to disperse them and in the ensuing panic and stampede several of them who had jumped into the river were drowned. In 1868 the Maharaja waived a sum of Rs 11 from the earlier Rs 49 tax. Following the Franco-German war in Europe, there was a serious decline in the market demand for shawls from what had been a major market. The ruler reduced the price of *shali* that the weavers bought from the state granaries. However the shawl industry continued to decline up to the point that he decided to abolish the tax on shawls altogether with only a small duty being levied on those exported. Later yet, this too was abolished in 1886 by his successor Maharaja Pratap Singh.

Though himself a man with little formal education, Maharaja Ranbir Singh was a great patron of learning and art. He made liberal donations to several educational institutions outside the state—to the Punjab University at Lahore when it was founded, and of which he became the first Fellow; and to Sanskrit institutions at Benaras with provision for funding the education of the state's students there. His personal interest in encouraging education within the state resulted in his establishing several schools, *Maktabs* and *Pathshalas* in Jammu and Srinagar.

The Raghunath Temple at Jammu built by him became an important centre of learning and research. A Sanskrit college was established here with a rich library with over 5,000 manuscripts, as well as a section for translating Sanskrit and Sharda works

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into Persian and Arabic; and Persian books were translated into Dogri and Sanskrit, with the help of *Maulvis*. The Maharaja believed that this would promote an exchange of ideas between scholars in the two communities.

His best efforts to improve the condition of his people did not yield the results he hoped for. On the one hand his reforms were not honestly or strictly implemented by his uncooperative officials, with the result that living conditions of the common people did not improve greatly. Nature too dealt Kashmir an unfair blow. Unseasonable and continuous rain between October 1877 and January 1878 destroyed the standing crops that had been ready for harvesting, but which had been delayed on account of revenue collection. Officials concerned about the total loss of the rice and maize crops ordered the sale of grains lying in the government granaries, without thought to putting aside enough for seed for the next year's planting.

As a result of this, Kashmir was faced with another famine, taking an enormous toll in the lives of people and cattle. Hunger drove people to eat anything that was edible in the orchards, forests and swamps. Many who sought to flee to the plains were prevented from doing so at the passes where troops were posted to prevent their migration. The old system of *Rahdari* prevented any person from leaving without permission. It is estimated that three-fifths of the population died.

Though the Maharaja did everything he could to bring grain from Punjab, it had to be brought in over difficult roads, and as was their wont, the officials used this opportunity to profit from it. Famine conditions prevailed until late in 1879, when in October a bumper crop was harvested. The effects of the famine

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lasted long, and when word got out of the Valley about it, the British administration found it an opportune excuse to charge the Maharaja with neglect and cruelty and to seek to send in their own officials to the Valley and its borders. Fortunately for the Maharaja, who challenged these accusations, an enquiry into the matter exonerated him.

The British authorities had long been concerned about the growing influence of Tsarist-Russia in Central Asia following the Crimean War. Ranbir Singh himself had been watching the activities of both the British and the Russian agents in that area. He sent in his own trusted officials to report back to him. The earliest of these was in 1864, when he sent in a military officer to study deployment of Chinese troops in Central Asia. The same year two of his officials had been sent to Yarkand. On reading the reports he brought back and noting the disturbed conditions there, he sought the permission of the British to send in a military expedition to Yarkand and Kashgar. In 1865 he sent a troop across the Karakorams with orders to take the fort at Shahdula, which they did. The Dogra troops occupied the fort for the next two summers but they were withdrawn in the winters. In 1866–67, he had another of his agents travel extensively in Central Asia and submit a diary of his travels. The same year yet another state official also travelled in the same region. These actions of the Maharaja aroused the suspicions of the British who started to doubt his loyalty to them, which resulted in their sending him a strong note of disapproval of his actions.

The British undertook their own operations to counter the Russian influence that had been steadily spreading eastwards

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from 1864–71 to include Chunkent, Tashkent, Khojand, Yarikurgan, Bokhara, Samarkand and Khiva, bringing it closer to the frontiers of India. The British countermoves included fomenting trouble in Chinese Turkestan and more significantly, in 1870–71, getting Ranbir Singh to appoint British Commissioners for Ladakh. The revolt of Yaqub Beg took place during this period, fuelled by the British presence in the area. Among the other concerns for the British at that time was the high regard Maharaja Ranbir Singh enjoyed in Central Asia, so much so that all communications to them were routed through the Kashmir Durbar. It was to his court that Yaqub Beg came in 1872 with presents. However, the Maharaja directed him rightly to proceed to the Viceroy instead.

It was this that resulted in the dispatch of Douglas Forsythe to Central Asia to negotiate for future British Indian trade connections. The Maharaja was persuaded to cooperate with him by way of providing men, supplies, transport and other arrangements for an ostensibly joint mission of British and Kashmiri officials to Central Asia for a duration of two months. On the return of the mission, the Maharaja was pressurized into a treaty of commerce with the British under which a British Joint Commissioner was appointed at Leh to oversee the upkeep of the road and the safety of travellers to Central Asia. The Maharaja had to pay for the initial repairs of the road and the rest houses, and make annual payments thereafter for its upkeep. He could also no longer levy toll or duty on goods sent either way on the road. Nationals of British India and Central Asia could set up businesses on the road for providing provisions or transport facilities. The British could carry out surveys in these areas. This

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'treaty', in fact, allowed the British to take over both political and commercial business with the Central Asian, Chinese, and Tibetan governments. With the appointment of a political officer at Gilgit, and a trade official at Kashgar, a period of total British domination of the foreign affairs of Kashmir was ushered in. In 1887, the British deputed an Officer on Special Duty to Gilgit. The Gilgit Agency continued until 1891. However, later it was no longer needed when, following the Afghan War, the British installed a new ruler in Afghanistan, thus ensuring their control over the entire area.

Maharaja Ranbir Singh's reign saw two very significant events. The first was the Trigonometrical Survey of the state and the preparation of its map. The Survey had been started in Maharaja Gulab Singh's time by the then Surveyor General of India Lt Col Waugh.

But the event of greater consequence for the state was the establishment in 1881 of a Missionary School by Rev Doxey at Srinagar. The school, by introducing the British system of education, enabled generations of Kashmiris to gain a modern education that would carry them into the future in the fast changing world. The opening of a hospital by a church's medical missionaries provided the best of medical care for Kashmiris by a succession of selfless workers right down to recent times. Both these establishments could not have been established without the consent of the Maharaja, who, with his concern for improving education and health care facilities, must have foreseen the benefits of permitting them to come into existence. Perhaps the only blot on the record of his reign was the terrible famine of 1878–79, brought on by unkind nature, the consequences

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of which he had tried to allay, but was unsuccessful, because of the mismanagement and greed on the part of his officials. In September 1885, he passed away after an eventful reign of 28 years. He was succeeded by his son Maharaja Pratap Singh.

4.2c Maharaja Pratap Singh

Maharaja Pratap Singh's long reign of 40 years marks a particularly significant period in the recent history of Kashmir. Commencing in the late 19th Century and covering the first quarter of the 20th Century, it ushered Kashmir into a modern era of development under the domination of the British Indian government. Immediately following the death of Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the British appointed a Resident in Srinagar. This marked the direct intervention of the British Indian government in the internal administration of the state, as well of the close monitoring of its northern and eastern borders. The new Maharaja kept indifferent health, and was not as strong a personality as either his father or grandfather, leading to doubts about his ability to rule. It was also a critical time when the Russian threat was looming large on the northern borders, a fact that could not be ignored by the British.

His father had had him well-educated in his youth. He was also well-grounded in managing affairs of different departments of state, where he had demonstrated his intelligence and his capacity for hard work. However, his submissive nature, unimpressive presence, and poor health were factors which were not in his favour. These gave the British the lever they needed to assert themselves and interfere in matters of state.

The year 1885, when Maharaja Pratap Singh succeeded his father, was a difficult year for the British. On taking office,

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the Viceroy, Lord Dufferin, was faced with the problem of demarcating the disputed northern border between Afghanistan and Russia. While negotiating this, Russia and Britain were brought into open confrontation after the Russian General Komaroff attacked and took over the Afghan post at Panjdeh. Though the Panjdeh incident ended without actual warfare, it made the British realize the need to strengthen and control the frontier regions, and the key to this was the control of Kashmir. The two earlier rulers had at every step prevented the British from violating the treaty that they had signed with Maharaja Gulab Singh.

The British had long been wanting to have their own man at Srinagar, and had already planned way ahead to establish a Residency there. Under the pretext of looking after the interest of European visitors, they had in Ranbir's time already had an Officer on Special Duty during the summer months. They were only awaiting the right moment to make a more permanent arrangement which would allow them in "assisting and supervising administrative reforms" and "watching events beyond the north-western frontiers of Kashmir"[12].

To this end, in 1885, shortly after the new Maharaja had taken over, the Viceroy sent him a dispatch stating that in the interest of good government certain reforms were needed, and that he should accept the presence of a British Resident at Srinagar. The Maharaja made a protest in writing, but it failed to prevent the appointment of the first Resident—Sir Oliver St John. In 1888, he was succeeded by another officer C Plowden, who set about putting into operation the actual British agenda of attempting to depose the Maharaja and annexing the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

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Plowden tried the British plan to divide and rule by setting a brother against the ruler. False allegations of treason and intent to murder the Resident were laid against the Maharaja, but instead of this conspiracy allowing them to take over control, it backfired. This happened when the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* of Calcutta took up the cause of the Maharaja. This resulted in a widespread uproar in India over the violation of treaty obligations, and the plans to depose him and take over the state had to be abandoned for a new strategy.

The Resident then pressurized the ruler to issue an *irshad* or an edict of resignation whereby he abdicated in favour of a Council of Regency headed by his younger brother Raja Amar Singh, and constituting Raja Ram Singh, Rai Bahadur Pandit Suraj Kaul, Rai Bahadur Pandit Bhag Ram, and an experienced European officer. Constituted in 1889 by the government of India, following the "acceptance" of the *irshad* by the Viceroy, the members in charge of their respective departments were under the control of the Resident who had the right to veto any measure or action taken by the council. It was clear from this that the British hoped to gain complete control over, if not actual possession of Kashmir. It was the control of Gilgit that was actually wanted and they got that the same year with the reestablishment of the Gilgit agency in charge of the political agent there. Earlier in 1877, even with an Officer on Special Duty, who was merely an Intelligence officer, the state had retained complete control over Gilgit in civil and political matters. In contrast, the new arrangement now gave the Political Agent complete control of the civil military and political affairs of the district.

Following this, the Resident was apprised of the poor condition of the state troops posted there and the need to remedy

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that situation. The Resident with the almost-absolute powers he enjoyed set about reorganizing, training and equipping the state forces from what was described as an 'armed rabble' into three regiments of well-trained, disciplined, and regularly paid troops, now designated the Imperial Service. They were trained by British officers and included a mule battery and 2,000 men, mainly Gorkhas and Dogras, who were then dispatched to Gilgit. By 1894, it was an efficient fighting force with Dogra officers, with a well-established communications link between Gilgit and the rest of India. This was facilitated by a road meant for mules and pack animals linking Gilgit with the Kashmir Valley, and a telegraph line that connected with the Residency in Srinagar and Army Headquarters in India. An efficient supply line for food supplies and arms and ammunition was maintained by the Gilgit Transport Service—a semi-government organization. However to keep Gilgit well-supplied, huge bulk purchases of rice and wheat in Kashmir resulted in famine conditions there for the civilians. Also in order to supply the manpower to get the supplies to Gilgit and clear the snowbound roads over the Burzil Pass, Kashmiris were forced into labour at very nominal wages.

All this was a prelude to the operations against Hunza and Nagar that had been under Kashmir in Ranbir Singh's time. In 1891, taking advantage of the chaotic conditions prevailing in that area, the two chiefs revolted but were subdued by the Imperial Service force under Colonel Durant and the territory was taken over and administered by the Dogras. Colonel Durant also took Mishgar, the northern most point of British influence. Though the chiefs were appointed as governors of their principalities under their terms of agreement in the name of the Maharaja, the Political Agent and the British-India government

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were virtual rulers in every area of life there. The Maharaja had no say, but he did have to pay for the greater part of the expenses incurred by the agency by way of the costs of maintaining their troops, building roads, schools and dispensaries. For this the state received a very small part of the revenue received. It also had to contribute labour and funds for the subsequent expeditions mounted by the British to Black Mountain and Chitral.

Having gained control of Gilgit and the farther frontier areas of strategic importance to them, in 1891, the British finally decided to restore his powers to the Maharaja. He was appointed President of the Council with Raja Amar Singh as his vice president. In 1893, Queen Victoria bestowed on him the title of Grand Commander of the Star of India. At the Durbar held in Srinagar to confer it on him, the Resident spoke of his "present good government", his loyalty to the "Paramount Power" and his assistance in the frontier expeditions and the Hunza-Nagar conflicts.

In 1895, the Maharaja who was in reality still a mere figurehead, complained to the Resident of his total lack of any kind of power. His repeated appeals for the full restoration of his powers finally resulted in some minor changes in the Rules of Business of the Council, but these were mere token gestures. It was not until the British consolidated their position in the north-west by the formation under Lord Curzon of the North-West Frontier Province, that they took any further steps to restore any powers to him.

It was only in 1905 that the State Council was abolished and powers of administration given to the Maharaja. He was assisted by a chief minister and three other ministers belonging to Revenue,

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Home, and the Judiciary. All these ministers sent their files to him through the chief minister. All orders were sent to the Resident for his approval. The advice of the Resident had to be followed when given. The budget was prepared and passed in consultation with the Resident. No resolution of the previous State Council was modified or cancelled without consulting the Resident. All appointments of Ministers and other important officials had to be approved by the government of India. These only amounted to a limited transfer of actual power with the control of the British authorities fully in place through the Resident.

With the death of one brother Raja Ram Singh as early as 1899, and of Raja Amar Singh (who had conspired against him early in his reign) in 1905, the Maharaja had greater scope for wielding his limited powers. At the onset of World War I, Maharaja Pratap Singh placed the resources of the state at the disposal of the British government. Following the war, in order to counter the upsurge and spread of the freedom movement in British India, the government realized the value of keeping the Indian princely states happy. Pratap Singh in his declining years hoped to benefit from their more relaxed attitude towards the princes. To that end in 1920, he made yet another application to the Viceroy for the restoration of his full powers that he had been deprived of in 1899 citing the valuable services rendered by him during World War I. In reply the Viceroy merely repeated the old litany of conditions that he would be required to fulfil. When Pratap Singh protested strongly to this as being a repetition of their earlier conditions restricting his powers, the Viceroy had to relent. But he still insisted on one particular condition—clearing all matters pertaining to the frontier and

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important administrative changes to the Resident. The Maharaja agreed to this and in March 1921, at a durbar in Jammu, Lord Chelmsford restored to him his full powers.

In 1924, the Maharaja followed this with a directive for the formation of an Executive Council of five members presided over by himself, and simultaneously, his intention to establish a Legislative Assembly. The outbreak of communal riots in the state did not allow for the constitutional reform to be implemented. The Council continued to function until the death of the Maharaja in 1925.

If one is to make an assessment of Maharaja Pratap Singh's long reign, it would appear from one perspective to be an era when the British had blatantly made a mere figurehead of him. They seriously curtailed his powers to rule, in order to carry through their own agenda of gaining absolute control over the frontier districts of his kingdom. Their purpose in doing so was to stop the advance of Tsarist Russia's empire, and curb the spread of its power and influence from south of the Karakorams into what they had come to regard by this time as their own empire in India. This they could only achieve by seriously limiting Pratap Singh's powers, but at the same time, using him by looking through him and his territory to consolidate their position there.

The other picture that emerges from the events of his reign is about the considerable progress, development and prosperity in the state and the betterment of its people. This was brought about by the policies of the Resident implemented by his own men on the State Council—British officials appointed to important departments; and other non-government agencies

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working in education and medical care. Earlier, among those who had suffered most were the people who worked the land, from which the state drew the greater portion of its revenue. The other mainstay of the Kashmiri economy was the shawl weaving industry that had also suffered greatly as a result of the loss of its most profitable market in France and Europe, on account of the Franco-German war. But even before that happened, it was in sharp decline with the miserable condition to which the weavers had been reduced. By law, they were indentured for life to the owners of the weaving establishments. The tax structure had been so manipulated by the owners that the burden of the taxes fell on the weavers, leaving them little to live on and even less incentive to work as weavers.

Devastating famines that had raged in the land had been brought about not merely by natural calamities, but had been aggravated by the total corruption in and the mismanagement of the revenue system. Deaths during the famines of 1887–89 had reduced the population to a fraction of its earlier numbers. Manpower in both agriculture and shawl weaving was also severely depleted by the lack of incentives for both the peasant and the weaver to continue in their traditional occupations. Oppressive taxation of the peasant was a major factor contributing to this.

The British were able to bring about much-needed reforms to resolve the problems that beset these groups of people and to give them back hope and the incentive to work. The most important of these reforms were the ones dealing with land settlement and revenue assessment. The architect of these reforms was Sir Walter Lawrence. In 1889, at a time when the

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state treasury was practically empty, Lawrence was assigned the task of land settlement in the Valley, a work that had been taken up two years earlier by A Wingate, but which he had to give up in the face of heavy opposition and intrigue on the part of revenue officials. Lawrence faced an uphill task himself with the opposition of the powerful, privileged official class, who were bent on sabotaging his efforts. But his commitment to reform helped him to finally complete his work in 1893. His work would continue until 1912, by which time every *tehsil* and district had been settled either in revision or for the first time.

Land settlement had been in force from the time of the Hindu dynasties when the state had collected one-sixth of the produce which constituted its main source of revenue. Over the centuries following that, during the reigns of the Muslim Sultans and the Mughals, the state had taken half to three quarters of the produce. In fact the Mughals decreed that for three months of the year, the cultivators had to live off only fruits and vegetables and give up grain all together. This was to provide grain for the city population and troops. By the time of the Afghans, who extracted every last bit that they could for every item that could be taxed, the peasants and the majority of the city folk were living off water chestnuts, which were available in abundance in the lakes, but were also subject to taxes. By the time the Dogras took over from the Sikhs, the system had deteriorated even further with the land agents of the state taking the largest possible quantity of grain—three quarters of rice, buckwheat, maize, and millets, and nine-sixteenths of oilseeds, pulses and cotton.

Lawrence's reforms brought a sea change in the lives of the cultivators. The state demand was fixed for 14 years. Payment

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was made in kind rather than cash as per Ranbir Singh's earlier attempt to reform in 1880. The use of force in the collection of revenue was done away with. Forced labour or *begar* in its worst forms was abolished. Cultivators were given occupancy rights in undisputed lands, thus giving them incentive to work those lands. Landowners holding in excess of a sanctioned area were assessed at ordinary rates. Permanent, non-alienable hereditary rights were granted to those who accepted the first assessment. All lands were evaluated on the basis of produce, previous collections and possibilities of irrigation. Wastelands, designated as *khalsa,* could be acquired by tenants on the basis of preferential rights. Most importantly, the exploitative practices under the earlier *rasum* were abolished, and the rents and liabilities of tenants were clearly defined. The Maharaja made life even more easy for the cultivators by writing off land revenue arrears to the tune of Rs 31 lakh.

The abolition of forced labour that had been the bane of the peasantry gave them tremendous relief. A rampant practice in the Afghan and Sikh times, Ranbir Singh had finally abolished it in 1891 on the persistent demand of the Resident. In order to prevent the transportation system from collapsing altogether following its abolition, the State Council set down rules for controlling and paying labour at the rate of five rupees per month. In 1906, wages were increased to eight rupees per month and finally by 1920, when there was voluntary labour available on these terms, *begar* was totally abolished.

Another area that developed to the state's benefit was that of road connectivity. This was achieved by building a first rate 200 mile cart road, linking Srinagar with the railhead and

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cantonment at Rawalpindi through the Jhelum Valley which made *begar* unnecessary. With the strategic importance that Kashmir had acquired for the British in countering the Russian advance southwards, this had become very important. The construction work that started in 1880 was assigned to a firm of British contractors who completed the work by 1890. With the establishment of this road link, the distance was covered in four days by horse carriage, and 20 days for heavy goods by bullock cart. However, with this development, the traditional route over the Banihal Pass, which had been used in earlier times, fell into disuse and trade between Jammu and the Valley was thus adversely affected.

It was not until 1913, that one of the Maharaja's farsighted ministers, Dr A Mitra, started construction on the Banihal Cart Road to link Srinagar to Jammu 200 miles away and to connect it with the railhead that had been extended from Sialkot to Jammu in 1890. Not only were these two important trade links with the Valley established with the completion of these two roads, but these roads also facilitated tourist traffic with its attendant, economic benefits to the people. The establishment of the telegraph and telephone systems to connect important towns to Gilgit and Ladakh also opened up the state to the world beyond its frontiers to include the rest of India as well. One important consequence of this was that it brought an increasing number of European visitors to the Valley, necessitating suitable accommodations for them. The Maharaja strongly objected to the British efforts to acquire land in Kashmir for such accommodations.

Out of this restriction imposed on them arose the development of the houseboat—a unique Kashmiri model of what became

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in modern times an accommodation to suit every pocket and class of tourist. The credit for this idea, oddly enough, goes to a Kashmiri Pandit trader, Naraindas, who was among the few Kashmiris to learn English from the Rev Doxey at his school. Kashmiri Pandits had never until then been boat builders or boat owners. His shop, catering to the needs of European visitors, was gutted in a fire, and in his search for new premises to house what he had been able to salvage, he moved his remaining goods to a *doonga*, a small boat used by *hanjis* for residential purposes, which he had moored at a suitable site. His new 'shop' did so well that he decided to improve on it by replacing its matting walls and roof with planks and shingles. Thus was born the first houseboat, with Naraindas becoming a boat builder.

His ideas were later modified and enhanced by Europeans into a longer and wider boat, partitioned to include living and dining rooms, several bedrooms, with baths and toilets. These were furnished to make them comfortable and liveable accommodations to suit early European visitors. An attendant *doonga* provided the kitchen facilities, with the boatman's family taking on the various duties entailed in caring for the visitor's various needs. To this day houseboats cater to the needs of present-day tourists to the Valley and provide a means of very gainful work for their owners, who are mostly the *hanjis*.

Among the troubles that beset the Sikh and early Dogra rulers were disease and epidemics that decimated the population. Malnutrition was undoubtedly the major root of the problems which were further aggravated by the lack of sanitation and the filthy conditions that prevailed in the city. With better connectivity with other parts of the country resulting from the building of roads, there was greater movement of people that

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resulted in the influx of diseases into the Valley, particularly, cholera and other epidemics, which further reduced the population. With the establishment of the Christian Medical Mission's Hospital at Srinagar, run very efficiently by the brothers Earnest and Arthur Neve, there was medical aid available to deal with the needs of the locals. On the advice of the Resident, the state government also opened a well-equipped hospital in Srinagar under Dr A Mitra, its first Chief Medical Officer. This was followed up by the setting up of a number of other hospitals and dispensaries all over the state. Later yet, Women's Hospitals were opened in Srinagar and Jammu. The first vaccinations against smallpox were done in 1894.

What made an even greater difference was that measures were put in place to make Srinagar a cleaner city. Roads in the inner city were widened and paved. Arrangements were made for scavenging, and latrines built. Clean water was piped into the city, ensuring that people were less vulnerable to water-borne diseases. Finally, with the increase in the numbers of educated people, there was greater awareness of the causes of disease. With the extension of medical facilities, fewer epidemics took place.

Natural calamities had also hit Kashmir hard; the worst and most frequent one being floods. Almost 12 centuries ago in Suyya's time, there had been dredging done in a unique manner to help flood waters drain out of the Valley. British engineers assigned to flood protection works, following the devastating floods of 1903 that swept away the Civil Lines area, prepared plans to deal with the problem on a long-term basis. They too understood the need for widening and deep dredging of the river bed at Baramulla to permit the flood waters to flow out

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of the Valley. They planned to set up a powerhouse at Mohara to generate the power to run the dredgers. The requisite heavy machinery needed for power generation as well as for dredging operations, were ordered out from America in 1905–06 and the powerhouse completed and commissioned in 1907. This made it the second hydroelectric project in all of India, following the first one in Mysore, which was also a princely state. The engineers also planned to dig a spill channel that would bypass Srinagar city to carry away flood waters and prevent the city from being inundated ever again.

The dredging operations started in 1908. By 1912, 6,100 acres of land had been reclaimed from the marshes around the Wular Lake, which were then allotted to cultivators for paddy cultivation. With no major floods in the quarter century that followed, and believing that dredging was no longer needed and was a waste of money, the state government stopped the dredging and sold the equipment as junk. In the years that followed the river once again silted up, and in the floods that resulted in 1928, inundated the low-lying areas of the Valley, destroying standing crops. Realizing the need for continued flood protection measures, the state now reverted to the practice of building the high bunds to protect the city, without a thought to the safety of the rest of the Valley.

With all the measures that had been taken to improve living conditions in the Valley, from 1911, there was a rapid increase in the population. However, agricultural production did not keep pace with the growth in population, and by 1918 there was a shortage of food grains. The first Census was conducted in the Valley in 1891 that put the population count for the Valley,

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(including Muzzafarabad) at 8,14,241, but by 1921, it rose to 14,07,086. A Food Control Department was set up to ensure equitable supplies of grain to the city dwellers. A card system was put in place to distribute a fixed amount of grain per head at fixed prices. Storage was provided in granaries to hold a year's supply of grains in reserve to meet these needs.

During the oppressive rules of the Afghans, Kashmiris had neither the inclination nor the resources to produce the artefacts and crafts for which they had been famous. These handicrafts that had kept the cultivators busy in the slack periods of their agricultural operations, had also been a source of additional income. With the new markets that were created by the tourist trade and the improvement in their living conditions they were now able to revive their handicrafts.

Another area of production which received a fillip at this time was the declining silk industry. With encouraging the growth of the mulberry orchards and the import of silk worms from China Maharaja Pratap Singh made a serious effort to revive the industry by setting it up on a commercial scale. Villagers were encouraged to rear silkworms at home to supply the factory that was set up in 1907. There were some 50,000 villagers rearing silkworms and by 1921, the factory well equipped to extract raw silk, provided employment for 5,000 workers engaged in various processes.

In 1901 a British army Major applied for and was granted a licence for mining rights for prospecting the entire state, and formed the Kashmir Mining Company. In 1906 he was given a licence under New Mining Rules to survey Reasi and Rajouri, and in 1907 to mine for sapphires at Padar in Bhaderwah. The latter operation yielded rich returns for gems mined, and royalty to the state from the sale of these.

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The French were responsible for the improvement of horticulture in the Valley and introducing new fruits to the Valley as well as improving the quality of vines grown. A nursery for grafting wild fruit stock was started and grafted stocks were later distributed to the state orchards. In 1907, a Department of Agriculture and Horticulture was set up which helped the fruit industry to develop and flourish.

One of the first orders issued on the formation of the State Council in 1889 was to change the official language, which had until then been Persian, to Urdu. This abrupt change put the earlier state officials, mainly Kashmiri Pandits, at a serious disadvantage. With this change, the Pandits, who with their mastery of Persian had hitherto dominated the administrative services, were thrown out of their jobs, citing incompetency and corruption. These jobs were soon taken over by Punjabis, who had come into the state following the appointment of three Punjabi members to the Council. The protest by Kashmiris against this were ignored by the Resident who held all the powers. The influx of the Punjabis continued until 1925, when the Maharaja put a stop to it by decree.

This was the genesis of the question of the 'State Subject' or *Mulkiat*, one who owned land or had permission from the Maharaja to do so. It had started with the question of denial of jobs to native Kashmiris, while outsiders by virtue of their knowledge of Urdu occupied every position in the administration from 1889 onwards. By 1912, there were several hundred Kashmiris educated both at the Mission School in the English Public School tradition, and at the State School that was started by Maharaja Ranbir Singh. They had all received a sound education in English and other subjects. In 1905, a college was

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established at Srinagar and another at Jammu in 1908. Kashmiri men were also going out of the Valley for further studies where they were exposed to the political movements—particularly the growing Indian National Congress movement for freedom and equality. There were freedom movements in other parts of the world as well including Ireland, Turkey and Egypt. There were many who put pressure on the state government to recruit only State Subjects to government posts. Foremost among these was Pandit Shankar Lal Kaul who carried on a strong campaign for it in the Indian Press.

Within the state itself those who had earlier lost jobs to the Punjabis continued their agitation. Finally the government yielding to public pressure accepted the principle of recruiting only State Subjects to government posts. This opened up the field to all educated competent Kashmiris irrespective of religion or caste. However Muslim religious leaders frowned on modern education for their community. Muslims in the state were less forthcoming in availing of the educational facilities in the state to qualify for state government jobs. However Kashmiri Muslims settled outside the Valley took up their cause and press the state government for better education for the Muslims of the Valley. In 1916, the Education Commissioner of the Government of India was requested by the Maharaja to make recommendations in this regard, and these were accepted by him in toto.

In 1924 when the Viceroy Lord Redding visited the state, some leading Muslims of the Valley submitted a memorandum to him on behalf of their frustrated community. There was a demand for proprietary rights in land for the peasants; better representation for the community in the administration;

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improvement for education for Muslims; abolition of *begar* in every form, and restoration of mosques in the possession of the state. The Maharaja, who by now had had his full powers to rule restored to him by the British, was furious at this. He had begun to see the hand of the British in these new trends and recognized their attempts to fan the flame of communal politics in the State to serve their own ends. There were local agitations and demonstrations in Srinagar which were put down firmly by the Maharaja. This resulted in an uneasy peace in the Valley. When the Maharaja passed away in September 1925, leaving no male heir, he was succeeded by his nephew Raja Hari Singh. By then, courtesy of the British intervention in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, it had already stepped into the modern age.

4.2d Maharaja Hari Singh

With no male heir to succeed him, Raja Hari Singh was groomed by the British to succeed his uncle Maharaja Ranbir Singh since his father's death in 1909. Born in 1895, the British Indian government took an early interest in his education. A British major, H K Barr was appointed his guardian, in which capacity he served until 1918, when Hari Singh attained his majority. From 1902, he attended Mayo College at Ajmer, where other Indian princes were also being groomed for their future role as rulers of their states. He then trained with the Imperial Cadet Corps at Dehradun. In 1915, Maharaja Ranbir Singh appointed him as commander-in-chief of the state forces.

During the First World War, when the Maharaja had put the state forces at the disposal of the British, Raja Hari Singh was in charge of their training and equipment. These forces fought very

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valiantly in France, Palestine and East Africa. Hari Singh also made a huge personal donation of Rs 43 lakh to the War Fund. However, all this did not serve him well when, on a private visit to England, he became the victim in the infamous 'Case of Mr A', which was widely reported in the British Press, and which just might have been engineered by the British government to give them a lever to manipulate him in the future.

In 1922 when Maharaja Pratap Singh was finally restored his full powers, Raja Hari Singh was appointed as a senior member of the newly constituted State Council. It was in this capacity that he gained valuable knowledge of and experience in handling the problems facing his soon to be subjects. He dealt successfully with the food scarcity that faced the state in 1921–22, and his intelligent handling of it averted a famine. When the issue of "State Subject" came up he favoured the appointment of State Subjects to all administrative posts. In his work, he placed his trust in all his officials, not favouring any one community. He succeeded his uncle with a great deal of good will, and also with great expectations of him from the people.

His *raj tilak* took place in March 1926, but the heavy expenditure incurred on it by the state treasury, raised the first doubts among his subjects. Initially however, he took several steps to enact legislation that was widely welcomed. The Agriculturist's Relief Regulations provided welcome relief to the peasants who no longer needed to dread the money lender. The Compulsory Education Act made education mandatory for boys in Srinagar and Jammu. The prevention of Infants Marriage Act forbade the marriage of boys and girls until the ages of 18 and 14 respectively. State Subjects were defined, and ensured exclusive

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appointment to government posts. At his *raj tilak*, he declared that his religion was 'justice' which offered great hope to all his subjects, particularly the Muslim majority of his state. All of these were welcome steps, which added to his popularity.

This popularity was not to last very long, since soon enough the Maharaja under the influence of self-seeking sycophants amongst his advisors and courtiers, lost touch with the realities on the ground. Given to a life of pleasure, he was unaware of the undercurrents of resentment building up in the state. The Maharaja favoured the Dogra Rajputs by appointing them to high government posts, ignoring the better qualified educated class among the other communities, who could have better filled the posts. This was particularly so with the educated Muslims who had qualified at Universities in India and who had faced discrimination when only Hindus dominated the service classes in the state.

The lot of the Muslim peasants in the rural areas had become miserable. Most of them were illiterate, and living and working in dire poverty. The growing population had put increasing pressure on the land. The depression of the 1930s in the world economy had had its negative effects on the shawl and handicrafts industries. The condition of these lower classes had been made worse by the fact that they had no one to represent their problems and grievances to the government. Even among the educated unemployed, there was no public platform or any means to express their opinions. There was a ban on the entry of seditious material from outside the state. There was also a ban on the formation of any societies, either social or religious, and this was rigorously enforced. Any person from outside the state,

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who was even remotely suspected of sedition, was watched and externed from the state.

However, with a full-fledged freedom movement in full swing in British India, it was not possible for either the British or the Maharaja from keeping the new wave of political thought, out of the state. Jammu's proximity to the Punjab brought in the first wave of protests and demonstrations by the students of the government school there as early as 1907, in the previous ruler's time. Kashmiris settled outside the state were also instrumental in highlighting the problems and issues facing the native Kashmiris—particularly the Muslims—in journals and pamphlets published outside the state. Gandhiji's Non-Cooperation and Satyagraha and the Khilafat movements inspired Kashmiris to protest against the inaction of their own rulers. Some of these protests had already preceded Maharaja Hari Singh's accession to the throne. The moment was fast approaching for the lull before the storm to unleash a raging storm.

The scene had already been set by a handful of Muslim young men newly qualified from Universities in India—mainly Aligarh Muslim University, imbued with the ideas gained there, but frustrated with their inability to enter the state service. They saw no future for the Muslim masses of the state living under Hindu Rule. Perhaps they also had at that point, the tacit support of the British Indian government that had now mastered the policy of 'Divide and Rule', and encouraged political activities on a communal basis. These young men organized a Muslim Reading Room in Srinagar and held frequent meetings as their numbers and their resentments grew.

In the meantime, Jammu too was not immune, being located closer to the propaganda campaign that was being unleashed

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against the Maharaja by the Muslim press at Lahore and elsewhere in the Punjab. In December 1930, the All Kashmir Muslim Conference that had come into being a few years earlier held its annual session at Lahore. It was attended by young men from Jammu who on their return started an agitation against the government in the Jammu region. In Kashmir, the Muslims of the Reading Room group were held in check from rising against the government by the Mirwaiz Ahmed Ullah. In March 1931, he died and was succeeded by a younger more enthusiastic supporter of the Reading Room group, Yusuf Shah, who had himself been a student at the Deoband Theological School in India. This development opened up the prospect of public meetings in the mosques of Srinagar and other towns in the Valley, at which speakers from the Reading Room addressed the people.

In the forefront of these speakers was a young and charismatic recent graduate from Aligarh Muslim University—Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah. Graduating in 1930 with an MSc degree, on his return to Kashmir, he had only succeeded in securing a teacher's post at the Government High School at Srinagar. Earlier, the Maharaja had constituted a Civil Service Recruitment Board for selecting candidates to higher posts on the basis of merit. Muslim candidates faced stiff opposition for these posts from Hindus with technical qualifications. Generally there appeared to be discrimination against the entry of Muslims into state service. Protesting these policies Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah resigned from his job, and as an active member of the Reading Room raised his voice against this injustice. A gifted speaker and an impressive and literally, towering personality with a commanding presence he was able to draw huge crowds to the mosque to give voice to

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the peoples' grievances. Communal tensions were coming to a head and only needed some excuse to let them lose.

This happened with the arrest and trial of a Muslim cook who had accompanied an European visitor to the Valley. On 21 June 1931, he made a speech at the *khanqah* which the government considered seditious and he was arrested. At his trial at the Sessions Court at Srinagar, huge excited crowds assembled inside and outside the Court with the result it was decided to continue the trial inside the jail. This change of venue did not prevent the assembling of about 5,000 slogan shouting people outside the jail demanding the withdrawal of the case against him. While making a move towards the main gate the crowd was halted by the police. When the people resorted to stone pelting the District Magistrate ordered the police to open fire on the crowd. Twenty one persons were killed and many more were injured.

The dead were paraded in the streets by an angry mob, and they vented their anger against the Hindu traders and shopkeepers in the main market. Shops were looted and three Hindus lost their lives in a communal outbreak at Vicharnag on the outskirts of Srinagar. The Maharaja dealt with the situation by sending in his own cavalry bodyguard to control the furious crowds. Hundreds of protesters were arrested and jailed. That evening the Jama Masjid was the venue where the bodies of the police firing victims were laid out prior to their burial.

This was an event that marked the beginning of widespread open protest by the Muslims against the Maharaja's rule. However after the situation had calmed down there were sections of the Muslims who were appalled that the traditional tolerant

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coexistence of, and goodwill between the two communities had been shattered during these protests. It also dawned on them, that if they wanted their freedom from the Maharaja's rule to succeed, they would have to carry all the communities with them with a more secular approach. However when the Maharaja appointed a committee headed by a High Court Chief Justice to enquire into the events, the Muslims protested and boycotted it, questioning its objectivity.

This move was supported by the British Resident who sent a secret message to the Maharaja from the Viceroy: "The Viceroy fears that findings by the present committee, if local Muslims refuse to serve on it, would do little to allay agitation". The Maharaja tried to assure the Viceroy that the situation would soon be under control, only to have the Resident pressurize him in August 1931, stating that the local Muslims had demanded an impartial British enquiry. He followed this up in September with a request by a delegation of Punjabi Muslims to meet with the Maharaja. This request was rejected by him.

The Maharaja dismissed his British minister and appoint another prime minister in his place—Raja Hari Kishen Kaul. The new prime minister realized that the only way to resolve the deadlock and ensure a return to normalcy was to arrive at an understanding with the Muslim representatives whom he invited to present their grievances. A truce was brokered, and the government agreed to withdraw all cases and to release all political prisoners. However the Kashmir Muslim Conference of Lahore, now re-designated the All India Kashmir Committee, fearing that they were losing control over the agitation in Kashmir through this move, denounced the suspension of the

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agitation. Sheikh Abdullah was persuaded to launch another agitation in violation of the truce, and he and some of his colleagues were arrested. This led to a popular display of outrage with processions being taken out in the city, but there were no incidents of violence against the Hindus.

The Maharaja responded immediately by enacting Notification 19-L, an ordinance that was followed by stern action: wholesale imprisonment, public floggings and police firing at Anantnag, Baramulla, Sopore and Shopian. This resulted in a strong note from the British delivered by the Resident, demanding acceptance of the following recommended steps within 24 hours: definite steps to remedy the grievances of Muslim subjects (the cow slaughter ordinance, the ban on *Azaan*, the prohibition of *Khutba*); the deputation of an unbiased British officer to hold an enquiry into Muslim grievances and demands; the appointment of a European Indian Civil Service officer as prime minister; and the externment of Sir Daya Kishen Kaul (brother of Raja Hari Kishen Kaul) whose presence in the state was regarded as detrimental to the Maharaja's interest.

The Maharaja was therefore forced to agree to the demands of his Muslim subjects under pressure from the government of British India. He withdrew Ordinance 19-L and granted amnesty to all political prisoners, and agreed to constituting an unbiased Commission to examine and make recommendations with regard to the people's grievances.

In the meantime, Jammu Province was also in the grip of unrest, fuelled by the Ahrar Party of the Punjab with connections with the Indian National Congress in its freedom movement. Concerned at the growing influence of the Ahmadiya Party among

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the Jammu Muslims, they organized volunteers to enter the state to stage protests along with their own sect members in the state. This coincided with communal riots by the Mirpuri Muslims targeting Hindus, with looting and arson directed particularly against the money lenders among them. The state government, unable to deal with the situation, requested the British to send troops to Mirpur and Jammu to restore law and order. On 3 November 1931, there was an instant response to this when troops entered the state, followed by an Ordinance prohibiting the entry of volunteers into the state from the Punjab.

The unbiased Commission that the Maharaja had agreed to constitute to examine the peoples grievances came into being on 12th November, headed by Sir B J Glancy of the Foreign and Political Department of the British India Government. There were four other members, one each from the Hindus and Muslims from the Kashmir Valley and Jammu Province. Within a few months of its working, the Hindu member from Jammu resigned, but that did not prevent the Commission from continuing its work and submitting its report.

The recommendations of the Commission covered the main issues that had been the source of grievances—the minimum qualifications for government posts should not be set too high "to prevent the due interests of any community being neglected"[12]. Proprietary rights of all land were granted, of which the ownership was retained by the state, and the rights of occupancy enjoyed by private persons. Several unpopular taxes were abolished, and industries were promoted in the interest of creating employment. While these recommendations were being worked out, the political situation in the state was fast changing.

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Every community had started demanding their basic rights, and realizing that a united movement was necessary to ensure these, the Muslim leaders decided to address the problem differently.

The narrow communal approach that had coloured the agitations of 1931 were by the middle of 1932 been diluted, with Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah forming the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference in October 1932. However, there were Muslims in Jammu who did not go along with the nationalistic sympathies of the Muslims of Kashmir. In Kashmir also, Mir Waiz and his followers cut off their connections with Sheikh Abdullah's party.

In March 1933, his party launched a Civil Disobedience movement demanding a Constitutional Reforms Commission headed by Sir Glancy. The Commission recommended the setting up of a Legislative Assembly elected on the basis of a limited franchise and having only powers to make recommendations. The outcome of this was the constitution of the Assembly known as the Praja Sabha consisting of 75 members, of which 33 were elected by different communities, but on a franchise that included barely three per cent of the population. Women were not given the right to vote, but those granted the vote included village and district headmen, title holders, retired officers, medical practitioners, lawyers and those who had passed the Middle School Examinations. In the first elections held in 1934, the Muslim Conference won 19 out of the 21 seats allotted to the Muslims.

The Praja Sabha could raise questions, move resolutions introduce bills and discuss the state budgets. There were several areas outside the purview of the Sabha: His Highness's Privy

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Purse, the state army, and the provisions of the Constitution Act. The prime minister appointed by the Maharaja had the power to return to the Sabha any bills for reconsideration, or recommendations for amendments suggested by him and the Council of Ministers appointed by the Maharaja. Failure to do so could result in its inaction by the Maharaja himself, stating that it was in the interest of good governance of the state.

The Praja Sabha provided a good training ground for its members in parliamentary procedures. The proceedings of the Sabha were a matter of great interest to the people at large. With the Muslim Conference being the single leading political party, it gave them the opportunity to understand the problems faced by other communities that were represented there. Sitting down face to face with representatives from other communities, and having discussions and debates on various issues, helped them to formulate their future political and economic policies. Their whole perspective was thus reoriented to the felt need for a broad-based party to fight for the basic rights of the people.

In 1932, the ban on the press and public debates had been lifted on the recommendation of the Glancy Commision. Other recommendations by Colonel Colvin, the prime minister, and the Resident, were finally to result in the Maharaja agreeing to lease the Gilgit Wazarat to the British India Government for a period of 60 years, handing over total control of the territory to them. In March 1935, the lease document was signed by Colonel L E Lang on behalf of the Viceroy, with the British assuming control over the territory, with the condition that it would be part of the Maharaja's kingdom. Mining rights also were reserved by him. This was the culmination of a long-desired British objective.

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Having achieved it, the Maharaja was given free rein to deal with political agitators, who could no longer depend on the British for support of their freedom movement. The All India Kashmir Committee at Lahore had also lost its influence in the state, and could no longer continue to direct the agitations led by Sheikh Abdullah. Muslims and Hindus were now to come together to fight for their freedom movement.

Sheikh Abdullah and his Muslim Conference were thus caught in a dilemma. His fiery speeches from the mosques, directed against the Hindus, and meant to fan communal discord, no longer had their earlier appeal. They had alienated the Hindus and the Sikhs. Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, former member of the Glancy Commision and a friend of Pandit Nehru, showed Sheikh Abdullah a way out of this situation. Introducing him to Nehru, and projecting him as the leader of the people of Jammu and Kashmir he gained Nehru's good will and confidence by aligning himself with Nehru and the freedom movement of the Indian National Congress. His party, the Muslim Conference observed 8 May 1936 as 'Responsible Government Day' throughout the state with an appeal to all communities to come together on a common platform and form a new party In 1936, Colonel Colvin had stepped down from the prime minister's post, and the Maharaja appointed Sir N Gopalaswami Aiyyanagar to replace him. A seasoned bureaucrat who had worked under the British as a civil servant, he was a true nationalist at heart. He steered the Muslim Conference towards becoming a truly nationalist party.

The Working Committee of the Muslim Conference met for a marathon session of 52 hours on 28 June 1938, and following

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a heated discussion passed a resolution recommending to its General Council that all people irrespective of their caste, creed or religion be allowed to become its members. Following this, 12 leading members representing different communities and political parties, issued a 'National Demand' to bring about complete change in the political and social outlook, and to achieve responsible government under the Maharaja. The following year, these recommendations were accepted by the General Council, and the National Conference came into existence, led by Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, G M Sadiq, Jia Lal Killam, Sham Lal Saraf and Sardar Budh Singh.

There were still several disgruntled elements with vested interests in the Muslim Conference, who were not ready to accept the new ideology of the National Conference. They strove to keep the old party alive for another few years until they found people with a similar agenda in the Muslim League led by M A Jinnah and his followers.

The first session of the National Conference held in October 1939, passed a resolution which included their earlier demands stated in the 'National Demand': responsible government based on a legislature of members elected on the basis of adult franchise of a joint electorate; legislative control of the state budget in all aspects accepting those of the military, political and foreign affairs, and payments of debts and liabilities incurred by the Maharaja. War in Europe had already broken out in September 1939 and the Maharaja had already pledged his full support to the British in their war efforts. This earned him an appointment in the Imperial War Cabinet, and British support in any steps that he might take with the people's freedom movement in his state.

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Initially, in response to the demand for "responsible government", the Maharaja conceded a few reforms by ostensibly increasing the number of representatives to the Sabha by seven. However, these were basically to ensure his own vested interests since these included extra seats for the various categories of the landed gentry and one from the constituency of pensioners.

In 1942, the Indian National Congress launched its Quit India Movement which evoked the expected reaction from the government with the mass arrest of Congress leaders. Though the people of Jammu and Kashmir were deeply moved by the turmoil that followed, the National Conference decided to abide by the direction of the Congress to the princely states to refrain from joining their movement. On 16 August 1942, the National Conference adopted a resolution stating that "the demands of the Congress is based on just reasons. The Working Committee condemns the reign of terror and repression which the Government of India have launched by declaring the Indian National Congress illegal and the arrest of leaders, and by shooting down unarmed people".

During the war years, the National Conference confined its activities to seeing to the needs of the common people. With the scarcity of foodstuffs and other essential commodities, the leaders of the party turned their efforts to preventing black marketeering and in the equitable distribution of food and fuel through the People's Food Committee, thus making life easier for the common man. This was despite interference from bureaucrats and the inefficiency of the system. The Maharaja in the meantime, as a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, was more concerned with bolstering the war effort of the British government.

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This helped the National Conference to continue its political activities. In 1944, it adopted a socialistic programme with a plan intended to "allow an all-sided advance along avenues of human activity regulated in a democratic manner on a country-wide scale". The plan was intended to cover agriculture, industry, transport, distribution, utility services, currency and finance; was to be based "on the democratic principle of responsible government with the elective principle applied from the local *panchayat* right up to the Legislative Assembly"[12].

This new ideology was very much in keeping with the common man's desires, and gave rise to the loyalty of the masses to the National Conference and its leaders. It was at this juncture that under the aegis of the revived Muslim Conference, and on the pretext of a rest in Kashmir, that Mr M A Jinnah and the Muslim League sought to seek a following in the state. They had after Mr Jinnah's breakaway from the Indian National Congress, already vitiated the political atmosphere in British India, with Mr Jinnah's 1940 Pakistan Resolution demanding a separate independent Muslim state and the partition of India on the grounds that Hindus and Muslims were different nations.

This two-nation theory of Mr Jinnah held no appeal for the people of Kashmir, grounded as they were in an age-old common cultural heritage that manifested itself in mutual tolerance and harmony. On the other hand, the Indian National Congress with its expressed sympathy for and interest in the people's freedom movement in the state held a greater appeal to them. This was reinforced by the 1940 visit to Kashmir of Pandit Nehru.

Mr Jinnah's efforts to win over the Kashmiri Muslim majority of this Hindu-ruled state found no takers, except among the

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members of the recently revived Muslim Conference. He was presented with an address of welcome by the National Conference, as a prominent Indian, "despite the ideological differences that we have with you". Mr Jinnah responded by stating that he was "happy to see all classes and groups combined to receive and honour me". However, at another reception given to him by the Muslim Conference, he changed his tack when he said, "Muslims have one platform, one Kalma and one God. I would request the Muslims to come under one banner of the Muslim Conference and fight for their rights". This was not acceptable to the National Conference with the slogan: "The ills of this land can only be remedied by carrying Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs together".

His visit to Kashmir had been for "rest', but soon Mr Jinnah demonstrated his true agenda, when he presided over the Annual Session of the Muslim Conference. He attacked the National Conference calling them "a band of gangsters". This caused a severe reaction from the majority of Muslims in the Valley, so much so that when he ventured to address a meeting at Baramulla, he had to be moved to another place to ensure his personal safety. Soon he had to leave the Valley without gaining the following that he had hoped for.

By 1945 and the end of the war, Sheikh Abdullah and his party had gained the confidence of the Indian National Congress. As a result, the summer of 1945 saw a unique session of the National Conference at Sopore at which the Standing Committee of the All India States Peoples Conference was held under the chairmanship of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. With representatives from many princely states attending, some important

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decisions were taken regarding changing the feudal structure of the princely states. There was emphasis on the similarity of political and social ideologies of the people of Kashmir with that of the rest of India. This session was also attended, among other leaders, by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan representing the people of the North-West Frontier Province and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad of the Congress.

As long as World War II lasted, the Maharaja enjoyed the patronage of the British, and no interference from them in the affairs of the state. N Gopalaswami Aiyyanagar's presence as prime minister ensured an orderly and firm governance which came to an end when he left that post. The Maharaja offered the post to several notable persons in succession—Maharaja Sir Maharaj Singh, Colonel Sir K N Haksar and Sir Benegal Narasimha Rao. However none of these gentlemen contributed much to solving the state's problems. The people themselves were well aware of them and were pressing for reforms to resolve these problems. In the summer of 1945 when Sir B N Rao stepped down, the Maharaja appointed a local Kashmiri Pandit Ram Chander Kak as his successor. Rising from his post as librarian at a local college, by sheer dint of his hard work he had attained the post of minister-in-waiting to the Maharaja. From there, it was a short step to the coveted post of prime minister.

Earlier in 1944, following the annual session of the National Conference which had passed a resolution demanding a socialistic society and democratic government, the Maharaja had inducted into his cabinet two ministers from among the elected members of the Praja Sabha. This small step had been accepted by the National Conference which had nominated its own candidate

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to the Cabinet as a step towards future cooperation between the people and the government. In actual practise however this popular minister found himself a mere figurehead and powerless, with non-elected ministers actively obstructing him in the functioning of his own department. Frustrated, he resigned in 1946. A month later, the National Conference launched its Quit India Movement against the Maharaja. R C Kak took stern measures to put down the leaders of the movement, primarily directed against Sheikh Abdullah and his family. Bakshi Gulam Mohamed and G M Sadiq left the state so that they could carry on the movement from outside.

Nehru was apprised of the measures being taken to put down the movement. He rushed to Kashmir despite his preoccupations at the time with Cabinet Mission. No sooner did he enter the state, he was arrested by the authorities. This sent shock waves throughout the country and fearing serious repercussions to it, Congress called Nehru back to Delhi for consultations. Mr Jinnah seized the opportunity to call the movement "an agitation carried on by a few malcontents who were out to create disorderly conditions in the state". There were in the meantime historic events taking place in India as well. The British government had finally agreed to the total transfer of power to the Indians and had announced a day for it. This announcement was followed by the partition of the country to allow for the creation of Pakistan—the new Muslim nation with its two wings flanking India on the west and the east. The people were spearheading their own movement for freeing themselves from the feudal rule of the Maharaja. It was in July 1947 prior to the Independence days of the two new

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nations (14th August for Pakistan and 15th August for India) that Gandhiji after witnessing the bloodshed during the mass migration of people to and from the newly created nations visited Kashmir. Speaking at Wah [in Pakistan] on his return in August 1947 he said that in Kashmir "it was very difficult for me to know whether it was predominately Muslim or Hindu". He also stated that only in Kashmir did he find "a ray of light" in the darkness of communal violence that had fallen over the two nations following Partition.

It was at this juncture that the Maharaja dismissed R C Kak and appointed his former Revenue Minister General Janak Singh in his place. This was also the moment in time when the Maharaja made the crucial decision regarding accession to India or Pakistan—a condition that the departing British had imposed on the princely states before they transferred power.

In most instances, there was no hesitation on the part of most of the princely states, which by virtue of either there geographical location or the demographics of their states, made their choices to accede to one or other nation. The most notable exceptions were Hyderabad, a vast Hindu majority state ruled by the Muslim Nizam; and Jammu and Kashmir, the largest of the princely states with a Muslim majority and a Hindu ruler. What compounded the issue of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir was its strategic location and its abutting the newly created frontier of West Pakistan.

Jammu had already been gripped by bloody communal riots directed against its Muslims following an uprising by a section of the Muslims in the state's armed forces in Poonch. Hindu refugees fleeing before them had started pouring into Jammu

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with reports of what had happened in those parts of the state that had been overrun by Pakistani forces in *mufti*. Armed tribesmen from the Hazara region on the border with Kashmir had marched into the western parts of the state, and taken Muzzafarabad, and were moving up the Jhelum Valley into the Valley, through Baramulla. They were looting, burning and raping and abducting women as they proceeded towards Srinagar.

The Maharaja, who had been vacillating on the issue of accession, now had his hand forced to appeal to the Indian government to help him stem the tide of Kabalis who continued to pour into the state, and stood practically at the gates of Srinagar. With his own position untenable, after signing the Instrument of Accession to India and seeking India's help in defending what was left of his state, he left Srinagar with his family, driving through the night to Jammu on 26 October 1947. He was forced by his circumstances to agree to the formation of an interim government, headed by the recently-released Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah and the National Conference. The first contingent of Indian troops was ordered in, and air-lifted into the state as the raiders stood at the outskirts of Srinagar at Shalteng. These troops secured the airport before further reinforcements could arrive.

The departure of the Maharaja and his Council of Ministers to Jammu left a vacuum, and the Valley was left without any proper administration to ensure law and order, and prevent it from descending into chaos. It was at this point that the National Conference organized its Mohalla and District committees to step into the breach and take measures to ensure peace and boost the morale of the people at large.

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With refugees pouring in from the outlying areas, fleeing from the horrors being unleashed by the marauders from across the border, the situation was critical. Food and shelter had to be provided for them. The citizens of Srinagar rose to the occasion and volunteered to house and feed them until other arrangements could be made for them. To stem the tide of invaders who were fast approaching the city itself, a small band of National Militia was raised to join the fragmented state forces in a last ditch stand to defend the city. It was at this point that the first of the Indian troops who had been airlifted in, and secured the airport were able to proceed to the defence of the city.

What is significantly curious is that in the process of delineating the frontiers of the new nation, the British had used the principle of assigning predominantly Muslim-majority areas of the Punjab to West Pakistan, they had made an exception of the Muslim-majority district of Gurdaspur, through which the trunk road to Jammu and Kashmir passed. Gurdaspur district was assigned to India. In hindsight, it would appear that the departing British who had their own British commanders-in-chief in place in the divided Indian army had probably had their own plans in place well in advance for the "liberation" of Kashmir. The conflict that was precipitated by the Maharaja's accession to India had probably been anticipated, and there is reason now to believe that the tribesmen who poured into Jammu and Kashmir were led by officers of the Pakistan Army in *mufti* and with the tacit approval of their British Commanding Officers.

With Lord Mountbatten as the first Governor-General of independent India, it should not have been difficult for the British officers still in command in the Pakistan Army to stem

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the tide of the liberation of Kashmir. The tribesmen in reality, were only out to loot the state and not liberate it. Instead of proceeding from Baramulla which they had taken quickly and brutally, they stopped looting the town and surrounding areas, instead of moving quickly on to Srinagar which was then defenceless and would have fallen as easily to them. That delay gave the Indian government the time to airlift armed forces into Kashmir and defend it by putting the raiders to flight. In that process the "Kashmir problem" was born, which remains unresolved to this day.

The rest is the history of Jammu and Kashmir ruled by its own people—events of six decades since then, shaped by their own actions, under leaders of parties of their own choosing. What has been the result is evident by the plight of the thousands of displaced Kashmiri Pandits, other Hindus and Sikhs, and Muslim families that have opted to leave the Valley to escape the terrorists, their guns and bombs and their extortions. For close to 20 years now, there has really not been a government by the people. For almost the first decade and a half, following the onset of militancy and the subsequent breakdown of law and order, there was perforce Governor's Rule imposed by the Centre. The state has seen five odd years of the recent coalition government of the PDP [People's Democratic Party) and the Congress, which was recently brought down by a coalition partner.

It would be worthwhile to examine the position and role of the Kashmiri Pandits during these six decades since Independence. In the first government of Sheikh Abdullah, there was representation of Kashmiri Pandits in his government at the ministerial and bureaucratic levels, and various other levels in

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the state machinery. So too, during the tenure of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed who succeeded him, and subsequently in the time of G M Sadiq and as well as Mir Qasim's time.

In 1975, Mir Qasim's Congress-led government paved the way for the return of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah to the Valley and to power, and the beginning of dynastic rule in the state. With the return of Sheikh Abdullah from his two odd decades of externment and exile from the Valley, it had been hoped and expected that the people of Jammu and Kashmir would no longer nurse their long-standing grouse against the Central government for its decision in 1953 to arrest and extern him. It would also have been expected that with the leader and party of their choice in government again, an Utopian era of development and prosperity would have been ushered in. But it was not to be. History tends to repeat itself when the lessons of history are forgotten. Within a decade and a half of his return the political history of the state was as convoluted as ever, and has spawned almost two decades of unmitigated lawlessness that has brought on calamity and ruin, negating all the benefits of the proceeding 40 years since the state won its freedom from centuries of feudal rule.

Kashmir may boast of its five millennia of history, and it is not easy for anyone to compress that history into a few hundred pages. Kashmir's history of the past half century is one that this writer has lived, and it is not possible for one having lived that history to give an unbiased account of it. Every Kashmiri needs to study that history and make his own assessment of it to determine what has brought the people of Kashmir to their present unenviable and dire condition. It is not merely necessary

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for Kashmiri Pandits to do it, but for every individual who claims to be a part of this state. Only with such a soul-searching analysis can one hope to see what went wrong and when and where, and finally see how one can go about restoring to this once "paradise on earth" a way of life that was idyllic and unparalleled, and has now been lost forever.

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FIVE

Pandits and Culture

"History can be helpful in making sense of the world we live in. It can also be fascinating, even fun."

"Heritage is our collective treasure, given to us and ours to bequeath to our children."

"If we stand back and see our own histories in a wider perspective, then we see how we are not just the products of particular individuals but of whole societies and cultures. If we are members of certain ethnic groups, we may find that we have inherited views on other ethnic groups, and we may find that others regard us in particular ways. History has shaped our fears, our aspirations, our loves and hatreds. When we start to realise that, we begin to understand something of the power of the past."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), pp 3–6

5.1 Evolution over the Ages

The dictionary defines culture as the "arts and manifestations of human intellectual achievements regarded collectively; intellectual development; the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people."

In his *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, T S Eliot makes an important statement wherein he suggests:

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> *"...no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion: according to the point of view of the observer, the culture will appear to be the product of the religion, or the religion the product of the culture."*

According to him, the term 'culture' has different connotations depending on whether it refers to the development of an individual, a group or class or of a whole society. He further enunciates three important conditions for culture. The first of these is:

> *"...organic, not merely planned, but growing structure such as will foster the hereditary transmission of culture within a culture: and this requires the persistence of social classes."*

> *"The second is the necessity that a culture should be analysable, geographically into local cultures: this raises the problem of regionalism."*

> *"The third is the balance of unity and diversity in religion—that is universality of doctrine with particularity of cult and devotion."*

All of these premises and conditions could apply in the context of the development of a distinctive Kashmiri culture.

Raymond Williams offers a different approach to the concept of 'culture'. By embracing the various bases of day-to-day living of a people and the significant events in their lives over time, he describes culture as a concept which

> *"...embodies not only the issues but the contradictions through which it has developed. The concept at once fuses and confuses the radically different experiences and tendencies of its formation. It is then impossible to carry through any serious cultural analysis without reaching towards a consciousness of the concept itself: a consciousness that must be... historical."*

Before these more recent definitions of culture, the term earlier referred to the growth and tending of crops and animals,

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and by extension, the growth and tending of human faculties. In the modern development of the term, two areas or concepts have affected it: 'Society' implying active fellowship or common doing before it came to mean a general system or order; and 'economy' which earlier was the management of a household and later extended to the management of a community and a perceived system of production, distribution and exchange. Each of these interacted with the changing history and experience of the particular group of people.

To understand the culture of a people, it is important to consider the factors that shape it and give it form and substance. These are the geographical, climatic, racial, social and historical factors which have influenced the people and their way of life from the earliest of times. The distinctive culture of the Kashmiri Pandit community can therefore be easily analysed in terms of its various experiences in the changing geographical, climatic and social conditions and later still, of historical and political changes.

Culture in the context of a people or a community includes everything involved in the rearing of individuals and the socialization process—the improvement of body, mind and spirit of individuals by nature, training and experience. Culture also includes all the characteristics of a race and community, beliefs and social institutions, music, art, literature, learning, levels of progress, state of refinement and civilization. It also covers the formal customs, usages and conventions and rites of passage regarded as vital to a group.

It is an undisputed fact that in any group or community, women are the preservers and transmitters of culture. Culture

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and its transmission from one generation to the next involves the observance of festivals, other ritual functions and rites of passage, attitude towards older members of the family, and a value system. Women are the ones most concerned with and affected by the impact of external factors on their daily lives, and the rites of passage in the life of the community. These external factors can be categorized as geographical, (climatic and environmental), and historical events (which affect social structures and religious and philosophical aspects of their life). There is a need to examine how these factors influenced the Kashmiri Pandit community in general in their long period of settlement in the Kashmir Valley, and the women in particular who are the custodians of their culture.

For the Kashmiri Brahmin of those times, his religion and philosophy determined his way of life and his culture. The lives of those early Brahmins in the settled phases of their history, be it on the banks of the Saraswati river or in the Kashmir Valley, or even later during migrations, revolved around their essential Hindu Brahmanism, which was vastly different from their earlier religion and philosophy of the West Asian transitional phase.

Later, in the move away from the Saraswati to the Valley, both religious form and philosophy underwent changes and modifications though still essentially Vedic. Previously, modifications and changes in the way of life had resulted from the change from earlier nomadic lifestyle of the hunter and gatherer to the settled life of the agriculturist and the domestication of cattle. Changes in food habits, clothing and dwellings followed the changes in geographical and climatic environments. Every aspect of life and culture were impacted through the transitions

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in this vast time frame of three millennia. The distinctive lifestyle, the social structures and institutions, the language, the traditions were all the result of the slow amalgamation of various influences working on this community over a long period of time.

Until the advent of Buddhism to the Valley under Ashoka, the population of the Valley was largely Hindu with a Hindu dynasty ruling over them. The Kashmir Valley became a part of the empires of Ashoka and Kanishka who brought and nurtured the Buddhist influence to it. At this time too there were minor exoduses from the Valley—north and eastwards along the Silk Route, when among others, Brahmins and Buddhist monks carried the message of Buddhism to what is now Afghanistan, Tibet, Mongolia and farther east.

The 6th to the 8th Century AD witnessed the decline of Buddhism in Kashmir and the restoration of Brahmanical Hindu society and Hindu dynasty. However, the advent and challenges of Buddhism in the intervening period left their mark on the social fabric of the Valley. There was widespread conversion to Buddhism among the lower castes of the Hindus and they, as distinct castes, disappeared leaving only the Brahmins.

Except for the political domination of the early Buddhists under state patronage under Ashoka, and later the Kushans, there was no religious strife. Theological debates were resolved through discussion and debates in those early times. Severe persecutions of the Buddhists however did occur under individual rulers like Mihirakula of Kashmir or as a back lash on the resurgence and revival of Hinduism throughout India wherever Buddhism had been well established. This led to its decline and virtual disappearance from the Indian subcontinent where it was born.

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This was the result of the elitist Brahmin community's attempt to re-establish their power and hold over what had been under the Buddhists a classless and casteless society.

With relatively more peaceful lives with the restoration of the Brahmanical Hindu society, the Brahmins developed a rich culture and peaceful traditions. They excelled as scholars and made significant contributions to civilization in religion philosophy (the Trika School of Kashmir Shaivism), the Sanskrit language and in the areas of medicine, history, art and architecture. Their lives were devoted to the study of the *Vedas* and other Shastras. Kashmir was then known as Sharada Peeth.

The Valley also produced saints and sages which helped in earning it the name Rishi Bhumi. But through all this development, it is important to remember that the Brahmanism that developed in isolation in the Valley was distinct from the Brahmin traditions elsewhere in India. Buddhist and later the Islamic influences forced on them by historical and political events left a deep and long-lasting impact on their culture. Their social life and religious behaviour were impacted by these various external factors. Nowhere are these reflected more than in some of the rites of passage of the Kashmiri Pandits.

In spite of the caste system based on inequality of man, the law of the Aryas prohibited slavery as ordered in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*—a political science work of the 4th Century BC. However, as revealed in Kalhana's later work, the plight of the common people in Kashmir was little better than that of the slaves. They were ruthlessly exploited for labour and the fruits of their labour by rulers and wealthy land owners on the one hand, and on the other hand, by bureaucratic tyranny and extortion

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of petty revenue officials, who belonged to the Kayasthas sub-division of the Brahmin community. In fact, deliberate attempts were made to keep them subdued and suppressed by denying them adequate food supplies or draught animals in order to prevent them from asserting themselves against those above them. While the wealthy fed on the finest of foods and cooled drinks, the peasant had to be content with rice and *hakh*.

There was, however, no bar of caste or birth to a person rising to hold civil or military positions. Some of the bravest of warriors and generals were Brahmins. Both Brahmins and lower castes were stationed as soldiers. There were also no restrictions on inter-caste marriages. This is evident from the various cited instances where a royal princess was given in marriage to a Brahmin or kings married women of lower castes. The greatest of Kashmiri rulers, Lalitaditya, was the son of a king under the Karkota dynasty by a woman of the Vaishya—trading class of Rohtak. Another warrior-king, Sankaravarman's mother was the daughter of a low-caste distiller. These would perhaps reflect the lasting effects of Buddhism's classless and casteless credo even until the 10th Century AD when another Kashmiri king married an untouchable of the Domba people, who as premier queen had entry to the Vishnu temple and her relatives were appointed as ministers.

The ruling house of Kashmir formed alliances with those of India and also of the Turkish dynasty of Kabul, who were Buddhists and Hindus during the first thousand years of the Christian era. Kanishka, the Indo-Scythian ruler of Kashmir and of the Turkish family of Kabul, founded the Sahi dynasty whose territories extended into Punjab.

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The famous Kashmiri Queen Didda was a grand daughter of a Sahi king. The last of the Sahi dynasty was defeated by the Muslim Turk, Mahmud of Ghazni. After their defeat, the Sahis took refuge in Kashmir, where they acted as generals and ministers and continued to inter-marry with the ruling family until the time of Kalhana. This would help to demonstrate the cosmopolitan nature of the Kashmiri people, and explain their diverse ethnicity.

In their earliest phase, the Aryans in India allowed their women a great deal of freedom. They were never veiled and were participants in the life at court and also at public events. Though ruling princes had several wives, they held open court and could receive homage of lesser chiefs. Queens were crowned side by side with the kings, had their own treasurers and councillors, and had the freedom to use their money for charitable endowments. Many have made their mark either as rulers or warriors. They had the benefit of education, as did their Brahmin sisters, and participated along with their husbands in religious rituals.

The status of women of the upper classes too during this period was relatively good and this continued until the advent of Islam to the Valley in the 14th Century AD. One of the factors that facilitated the advent of Islam into Kashmir was the tyranny of the orthodox priesthood, which refused to admit Rinchen Shah, a Buddhist prince from Ladakh, into Hindu fold. On usurping the Hindu Kashmiri throne, he had requested to be converted and on being rebuffed by them, converted to Islam instead, after observing the humanism of the Sufis.

It would not be out of place here to mention that the large-scale conversions of the lower classes among the Hindus to

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Buddhism and later to Islam represented protests against the dominance of the Brahmins. Both Buddhism and Islam preached the oneness of God and of all human beings, and were critical of the social inequities associated with Brahmanism. They also championed the cause of the marginalized sections of society such as the peasants and labourers.

It is significant that long before the forcible conversions and severe persecutions under Sikander 'But Shikan' and later under the Mughals and Afghans which precipitated major migrations of the Brahmins out of the Valley to escape the sword, the Rishi Movement under the revered 'Nund Rishi' (Hazrat Nuruddin Noorani) was responsible for the peaceful and wide spread of Islam in Kashmir. This mass movement directed against inequalities and superstitions sought to spread the message of equality and justice and found ready converts among the oppressed sections of the population.

It also had a critical role to play in challenging the status and role of women and in encouraging them to resist their earlier subordination to men under the Brahmin patriarchy. Lal Ded represented the foremost among such women. It is significant and speaks volumes about this subordinate role of women that nowhere in the writings of the Hindu historians of the time is she mentioned and the first writings about her are by Muslims, much after her time, where they acknowledged her influence on the spiritual development of Hazrat Nuruddin Noorani.

These facts serve to highlight the migrations, transitions, and events that have marked the history of this community. They have played an essential part in shaping their lives and culture. At this point, it becomes important to examine how all these

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centuries of change have affected the lives and status of the women of this community and its culture.

5.2 Festivals

The worship of the Mother Goddess—the female principle in Shaivism—was something that had come down from the time of the community's first contacts with the Dravidians in the northern plains of India, and later with their contact with the Nagas in the Valley. Over the centuries, religion and philosophy had evolved and changed in form and substance. With the decline of Buddhism and the restoration of Shaivism after the 8th and 9th Centuries, the Trika (Kashmiri Shaivism) and Shakti worship were restored to the Valley. This was manifested in the various shrines dedicated to the many forms of mother Goddess.

These ancient shrines include those at Tula Mula (Kheer Bhawani), Hari Parbat and Khrew. Each of these shrines was dedicated to various aspects of the Goddess—conforming to either Vaishnavite or Shaivite beliefs—and the distinctive offerings made here reflected these beliefs. There are strict injunctions regarding eschewing non-vegetarian foods before visiting Tula Mula. The offerings here include milk, *kheer* and *qand*. These taboos are adhered to even by the Muslims who sell milk and floral offerings outside the shrine.

But at the shrines at Khrew and Hari Parbat and at the Mahakali shrine at Zestha Bhagwati-Zeethyar, the offering is *tahar*—yellow rice prepared with turmeric, oil and salt and chopped liver. At Zeethyar, along with the *tahar* there is an offering of lungs and heart of sheep to the birds of prey hovering

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overhead. Today, however, these practices are being discouraged by the custodians of these shrines—the security forces—who protect them in the absence of their traditional caretakers.

The ancient shrine that gave Kashmir the name of Sharada Peeth and dedicated to the Goddess of Learning, Sharada, was established on the heights overlooking the confluence of the Kishan Ganga with the Madhumati. Today it lies in Pakistan-occupied territory. The Shree Chakra, that was in the inner sanctuary, is credited to Shankaracharya who is stated to have consecrated it. After Pakistan occupied that area following the Partition, the yearly pilgrimages of Pandits who visited the shrine have ceased and little is known about the present condition of the shrine.

In a goodwill gesture made to Shri L K Advani on his visit to Pakistan, he was able to visit the shrine. A tentative proposal was made by the Pakistan Government to restore the shrine but apparently nothing concrete has been done about it since then. Other important shrines dedicated to the Goddess are the Bhadrakali temple at Handwara and the Shailaputri in Baramulla in the north of the Valley. In the south, there is Trisandhya at Anantnag and Tripurasundari at Kulgam.

Each shrine has its special day and celebrations which in earlier times drew worshippers from all over the Valley for such occasions. Although these festivals were celebrated with the visit of the whole family to the shrine in question; the worship following the usual pattern adhered to elsewhere by the chanting of *stotras*, singing of hymns, offering of *archanas* and *aratis*, offerings of flowers and *naived*, there was a difference. In the chanting of mantras, instead of adherence to the original rhythm

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known as *chand* and precise enunciation of the mantras and the *stotras*, there is a typically Kashmiri sing-song cadence with a slurring of the text, a reflection of the deep-rooted influence of the Buddhist mode of chanting. Strangely enough, this is reflected even to this day in the group congregational prayers offered in mosques in Kashmir.

The selection of chants and hymns also reflects the various influences; the *Indrakshi* in praise of the Goddess by Indra from the early Vedic Aryan period, the *Bhawani Sahasranaman* and the *Panchastavi* in praise of Tripurasundari from the post-restoration period of Hinduism by Shankaracharya. All of these are distinctive of the Kashmiri ethos. The essential Vedic Brahmanism of the Kashmiri Pandit family manifested itself in worship in the temple as well as within the home.

At home, the daily ritual was conducted by the patriarch and his wife whose presence was necessary beside her husband during the performance of the daily ritual. In earlier times, children learned the chants, hymns and rituals by daily participation. The family priest only presided over household rituals on special occasions such as *Herath* (Shivratri), birthdays, and the performance of *yagyas*, or the rites of passage at death.

The preparation of the *thokur kuth*, the ritual cleansing of the space and utensils for daily worship, assembling and preparing of the offerings such as *kheer* or *tahar* was the responsibility of the housewife. A preparation similar to the *tahar* is an offering at the *Ziarats* of the Reshi (Sufi) tradition in the Valley. *Tahar* is also an offering at the ritual celebration on birthdays. Once the offering is made, a portion is then offered to the birds by scattering it on the roof. It is also prepared and offered in a

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similar manner as thanksgiving when someone in the family comes through some dire situation.

The start of the calendar year ushers in the first major festival of the year, Shivratri. It comes generally in the month of February or March. Shivratri or *Herath* is celebrated on the thirteenth night of the dark fortnight in *Phalgun*. For the Kashmiri Pandit, this is the most important and elaborate of all festivals that are celebrated during the year. Unlike the manner in which it is observed elsewhere in the country, Kashmir has its own unique celebrations.

In most places across India, Mahashivratri worship takes place in Shiva temples, but in Kashmir the puja is performed at home. Elsewhere devotees bathe at sunrise in any water body and offer prayers to the Sun, Vishnu, and Shiva. Subsequently, the Shiva Lingam is bathed in the five sacred offerings of a cow (*pancha gavya*)—milk, sour milk, urine, butter, and dung. The offerings made after this are the five foods of immortality, which include milk, ghee, curd, honey, and sugar, along with *datura* and *jati*, which are said to be sacred to Shiva despite their toxicity. Devotees fast during the day and offer prayers throughout the night and break their fast only in the next morning.

Kashmiri Pandits celebrate Mahashivratri in their own distinctive manner. Subscribing to the Trika School of Kashmiri Shaivism, Kashmiri Pandits are devotees of Shiva and Shakti and are *Shaktas*. While elsewhere Shiva alone is worshipped in the form of the lingam, in Kashmir Mahashivratri is celebrated as the night of the marriage of Shiva and Parvati.

To some, Shiva represents the *Mahayogi*—the Ascetic. He is also Mahadeva, the great God. Shiva is, in fact, the most ancient

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of Indian Gods, predating even the Vedic Gods. In Kashmir, Shiva's paramount position in the Kashmir pantheon arises out of the integration of the pre-Vedic worship of the Mother Goddess with the Vedic Advaita philosophy. This development occurred in the wake of the Saraswat community's migration into the Valley following their displacement from their earlier settlements on the banks of the river Saraswati. The isolation of the Kashmiri Saraswats from their other brethren outside the Valley resulted in the emergence of the Trika School of Kashmiri Shaivism with its unique philosophy and rituals.

The Kashmiri Mahashivratri festival is observed over fifteen days of the dark fortnight of *Phalgun* starting with the *Parva*—the first phase of the waning moon and extending to the first phase of the waxing moon. Long before the onset of this period, the whole house is given a thorough cleaning and is re-furbished in preparation for the festival. As part of the preparation, new clothes are sewn for every member of the family and earthenware utensils and other household needs are bought including those needed for the rituals during the festival.

Each day or set of days during this fortnight has its special name and religious significance. The first day of the dark fortnight is *Hurya Okedoh*. On this day, the cleaning of the house is completed with the ritual cleaning of the *Thokur Kuth* and the main front door, *daar*, to welcome Lord Shiva and Parvati. On *Hurya Saptam*, that is the seventh day, all items required for worship are collected. On *Hurya Aetham*, the eighth day, in the days before the exodus from Kashmir, *havan* was performed at Hari Parbat at Srinagar and Sharika Bhavani was worshipped with night-long chanting and hymns.

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Hurya Navam, *Dyara Daham*, and *Gade Kah*, the ninth, tenth and eleventh days respectively follow. Depending on the practice exercised in individual families and households, meat, fish, and vegetables, are cooked. This is also the occasion for married women to visit their parental homes for bathing and washing before returning to their in-laws with presents which mostly include new clothes, *kangris*, and *khadawan*.

On the eleventh day, the *thokur kuth* is decorated and all the Gods and Goddesses are installed therein. On *Wagur Bah*, the twelfth day, worship is commenced with that of Lord Ganesha. A pot of *ganga jal* is also worshipped on this day.

The thirteenth day is the actual day of Shivratri. Shiva and Parvati represented by two earthen pitchers filled with water and walnuts (which are soaked in that water) are worshipped. A number of other smaller earthen vessels, each with walnut and water, symbolize the other deities and *ghanas*. Each of these is decorated with flower garlands and *niarwan-roli*. The oldest male member observes a fast and performs the puja. All other members are also expected to observe the fast and participate in the ritual. In earlier times, the family priest would conduct the puja. This meant that the families had to await his arrival to commence the rituals. He invariably had other families for whom he performed the same service. It certainly was a long day for him and profitable too as he collected *dakshina* in cash and kind from each household.

The walnut, being the only fruit available at this time of year in Kashmir, has a prominent place as the offering and *prasad* after the ritual. Other offerings include all the cooked food items intended for breaking the fast, along with the raw, uncooked

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rice, salt (a precious commodity in earlier times), and money (in coins) which the guruji takes as part of his *dakshina*.

Shiv Chaturdashi is the fourteenth day of the fortnight and celebrated as *Salaam*—the day when relatives, friends, and neighbours arrive in the morning to wish the family '*Herath Mubarak*' with the traditional offering of a handful of *elaichi* and *badaam*. It is only in recent times, with influences from outside the Valley, that sweets are offered. It is a day of feasting and enjoyment. Everyone adorns new clothes. The patriarch doles out the *Herath Kharch* (money presents) to children, younger family members and the domestic help. Friends and neighbours of all communities get together to play cards and gamble, much like the sessions that follow Deepavali in other parts of the country. *Dyara Daham* (*dyar* meaning money in Kashmiri) is the day when playing cards or some other form of mild gambling was part of the festivities.

On the *Amavasya*, yet another unique custom is observed. This is the last day of the festival when all the earthen vessels used in worship are collected by the lady of the house and immersed in the nearest river or lake. On her return to the house, she knocks on the door, and the person outside is asked to identify herself. The answer is *Ram Bror*. After identifying herself, she is let in as she brings wishes and blessings for the health, wealth, and happiness of the family. At this point some walnuts are broken and the rest of the walnuts are distributed among the family and friends along with small rice cakes as *prasad*, bringing to a close the celebrations of *Herath*. The grand finale is the distribution of soaked walnuts and *rotis* among friends, neighbours, and relatives as *prasad*.

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The Kashmiri New Year, *Nav Reh*, marking the onset of the new Sapt-Rishi Sanwat year (now 5084) is usually celebrated with feasting and rejoicing. In the days before the exodus of 1989–90 from the Valley, the *Nav Reh* celebrations coincided with the onset of spring, with the first blossoms on the almond and fruit trees in the orchards; mild, balmy weather after the bitter cold of winter, and the first outing of the family to enjoy the delights of the outdoors. In those days families picnicked in gardens and orchards. Badamwari at the foot of the Hari Parbat and the Mughal Gardens were favourite spots. It is worth noting that the Parsi and Iranian New Year, *Nav Roz*, and the Shia New Year coincide with the Kashmiri Pandit New Year.

But the most significant part of the occasion is observed at home on New Year's Eve and at daybreak on *Nav Reh*. On the previous night, the housewife prepares the *thal* for the *Thal Bharun*. Early the next morning, each member of the family is woken to view all the auspicious items assembled on the *thal*: the picture of the deity, rice, *kulcha*, walnuts, the new almanac (*nichipatra*) money as currency notes and coins, milk and curd, the first spring blossoms, and the pen (a most important instrument for the Kashmiri Pandit who values literacy and education). This auspicious viewing of the *thal* is unique to Kashmir, except that in Kerala there is an echo of a similar ritual where on their New Year's Day, *Vishu*, parents lead the children with their eyes closed to open them to view the *kani*, a wondrous sight with a similar auspicious assemblage of items with oil-lit lamps in the prayer room of the family. The offerings to the deity there are *appams*, rice, fruit, a mirror, silver and gold as coins and ornaments and laburnum blossoms. The difference is that

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the Kerala New Year unlike the Kashmiri one is based on the Solar Calendar and coincides with Baisakhi of the north. With a section of the early Saraswats having migrated to this region of coastal Karnataka and Kerala, it is possible that this is the same rite except in a different context.

The third day of the New Year, *Zang Trai*, is an important occasion for the married women of the household. *Zang* here refers to an auspicious start or sign. Some persons, events, and animals are deemed to be inauspicious, for instance a widow, a sneeze, a funeral procession among the countless superstitions that Hindus subscribe to. *Zang Trai* is the day when the married women go to their *maike*. It is an outing and celebration looked forward to by all married women, young and old. It gives them a chance to visit their natal family for feasting and celebration. They return to their in-laws with gifts of new clothes and other presents in cash and kind. For the daughter-in-law, the occasion provides a welcome break from her responsibilities at her husband's home, as she can spend time with her parents and relatives at her natal home.

The first year of the bride's life with her in-laws invariably puts a burden on her people when for every occasion such as the husband's, mother-in-law's, father-in-law's birthdays, and every other festival the family and the community celebrates, they are expected to bring gifts for the members of the family. It also becomes an occasion for one-upmanship on the part of other daughters-in-law in the family to put down those who cannot do as well. Not a very enviable situation! Oddly enough, the Kashmiri Pandit families who value education and in recent times have gone out of their way to find brides for their sons

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who are well-educated and preferably working women capable of bringing in an income do not appreciate that the parents of the bride are made to bear such a burden after having already invested in her education and training for that purpose, not to mention a huge amount spent on her marriage and attendant ceremonies. It is hardly fair to cater almost lifelong to the expectations of her in-laws.

For the Kashmiri Pandits, there are several festivities and rituals that are celebrated around the principal shrines in the Valley. The most important of these is the *Jyeshtha Shukla Paksh Ashtami* to honour Ragniya Devi at Tula Mula (Kheer Bhawani). *Ashad Shukla Paksh Navami* is dedicated to Sharika Bhavani at Chakreshwari Temple at the foot of Hari Parbat. *Ashad Shukla Paksh Chaturdashi* is the festival of Jwala Bhagavati at Khrew. This, as the name suggests, is the site of an ancient extinct volcano. All these festivals, in the days before the most recent diaspora, drew large numbers of worshippers to the respective shrines. Apart from the usual rituals and oblations of individual devotees, these shrines were invariably the occasions for *yagnas* performed by families or the community at large.

According to a popular belief, the Kheer Bhawani has a distinct feature that the colour of the water in the *kund* on *Jyeshtha Ashtami* provides a portent for what the year ahead holds for the community. It is said that during the year preceding the most recent exodus and during the early years following it, the water was murky, blackish, and ominous of what lay ahead for the Valley. In recent years when it has been possible for members of the community to venture back, the number of devotees visiting the shrine have been constantly increasing. Most recent

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reports speak of clearer water once again heralding better times to come. Old timers, who were witness to it, speak of a similar phenomenon preceding the Kabali (tribal from across the border) invasion of the state in 1947.

It is significant that these dates and festivals associated with various shrines have no special place in the Hindu calendar for the rest of India. However, since the exodus, the nostalgia and longing for these shrines have prompted the community to re-create them outside the Valley in Jammu and Haryana so that festivals are celebrated at these sites with equal enthusiasm and fervour.

There are several festivals and rites of passage which are the exclusive preserve of women. Among these is the occasion of *Pan*—the celebration to honour Vinayak, the son of Shiva and Parvati who is considered the remover of obstacles. The senior-most woman in the household assisted by the other women prepares the *pan*, which are large sweetened *roths* made of wheat flour, ghee, *shakkar* and covered with *khas-khas*. These are deep fried in ghee or even prepared on a *tava*. The ritual fare—to follow the narration of the legend of the exiled king and the trials and tribulations that he and his family suffered—is also prepared by the ladies and has to be vegetarian. It is a rather simple fare including *du-wark rotis* and a vegetable of potatoes and brinjals with little seasoning except some salt, green chillies and a little oil, signifying the lean times that the king and his family lived through while in exile. Throughout his exile, the prayers and the frugal offerings to Vinayak by the queen and their daughters restored eventually all that they had lost earlier. During this celebration, the lady of the house drapes a cotton

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thread spun by a young unmarried girl over her ear while she narrates the story to the assembled family. It is this cotton thread that gives this rite its name *Pan*. Following this, the family eats what has been prepared. The *roth* is then distributed to other members of the family. This celebration takes place between *Vinayak Chaturthi* and *Ganesh Chaturdashi* and is one that every housewife performs faithfully each year.

There are, however, other festivals celebrated all over Hindu India that have importance for the Pandit community. *Shravan Poornima* is celebrated as *Raksha Bhandan* north of the Vindhyas. For the Kashmiris this festival has a special association with the Amarnath Yatra with culmination of the pilgrimage on that date, at the shrine in the mountains with the *darshan* of the naturally-formed ice lingam there. This lingam is reputed to wax and wane with the phases of the moon and attains its maximum size in that month by the time the moon is full. This shrine also, in the old days, drew pilgrims from all over the state. Recent years have seen increasing numbers of pilgrims running into hundreds of thousands, from all over the country venturing to make the difficult five-day trek to the cave despite the threats posed by inclement weather, high altitude, and attacks by terrorists. Security forces now help by providing protection and helping in emergencies, natural and otherwise; and voluntary organizations from all over the country help ease the pilgrims' progress by providing shelter and food at the nightly stop-overs en route. This is over and above the provision of facilities by the state government of transportation—porters, ponies, and *dandis* for those who cannot manage the long and arduous trek. In recent times, the shorter one-day trek out of Bal Tal by

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the northern route has been organized by the Army. In the old days, for those who could not make it to Amarnath there was always the option of celebrating the festival at various Shivalayas in and around Srinagar, or in the smaller towns in the Valley. There was also the mini pilgrimage to the Shiva temple on the top of Shankaracharya hill overlooking the city. This too is said to be an extinct volcano.

Other festivals that the community shares with their Hindu compatriots are *Janmashtami* and the two *Navratras* of spring and autumn culminating in *Ramnavami* and *Dussehra* respectively. How the community celebrated these in the Valley earlier may have been different from the way other communities did so, but today with their dispersal outside the Valley, the earlier unique features of their celebrations have been modified with their exposure to Brahmins outside. For instance while in earlier times it was permitted for them to eat meat during the first four days of the *Navratras*, today they have fallen in line with other Hindus and eschew meat throughout the nine days. The idea of Kashmiri Brahmins being non-vegetarians does not go down well with Brahmins outside the Valley. Many families after leaving Kashmir have become totally vegetarian, for whatever reason, but largely on the prompting from their own priesthood. Every year the new Kashmiri Almanac makes a bold pronouncement to that effect. The inference is that the Pandits have brought down the wrath of God on themselves by such practices.

Another occasion, which is a family ritual each year, takes place in the dark fortnight of the month of *Paush* each winter. Probably no other Brahmin community celebrates the propitiation of the *Ghar Devta*, the presiding deity of the

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household, in quite the same way. An offering of cooked rice and fish is made to the deity in the attic of the house where he is said to reside.

The *Amavasya* of *Paush* brings another occasion that has its roots in legend and superstition. This is known as *Khichri Amavasya*. This entails the preparation and offering of *khichri* to the *yakhshas* by the housewife. In the early days of the community's migration to the Valley, these *yakhshas* were said to descend in the winter months from the surrounding high mountains into the Valley along with the *nagas* and *pishachas*. In those early years, before they got acclimatized to the rigours of winter, the migrant Saraswats left the Valley for warmer climes. On one such occasion, an old couple who had been left behind to fend for themselves because they could not make the journey with their family, were confronted by two hungry *yakhshas*. On being fed by them on *khichri*, they promised to protect them from the *nagas* and *pishachas*.

To the surprise of the returning family in the next Spring, they found that the old couple had survived the winter. It is said that following this, the Brahmins struck a deal with the *yakhshas* to feed them *khichri* in return for their help in ridding the Valley of *pishachas* and *nagas*, thus enabling them to settle down permanently without the winter exodus. For the latest migrants following the diaspora of 1990, the *Khichri Amavasya* has a special significance and is observed without fail by all Kashmiri housewives.

It might be mentioned here that all these observances are presided over by the women rather than the patriarch or priest, and act as occasions to bring everyone together for the celebration.

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This adds a little color and interest to their lives in a particularly bleak time of the year. Therefore, it is not strange that even today, women have kept these traditions alive rather than let them lapse as some others have been allowed to do.

Of some such that have lapsed is the *Zate Karm* which originally involved the blessing of the newborn child by the father before the umbilical cord was cut following birth. Today since few births take place at home, this rite is redundant. This is now combined with the *Kahnethar* either on the 11th day or much later. This ceremony is performed to invoke blessings of the Almighty on the child and the mother, and is attended by close family members including the mother's parents, who come bearing monetary and other gifts. It is one of the few ceremonies where they may partake of food and drink at their daughter's marital home.

There are also several minor rites such as *Chitter Amavas*, *Haar Satam*, *Anakoot*, *Dharbi Amavas*, *Ante Chodah*, *Kao Poonim*, *Tilla Aetham* and *Sonth* which have been allowed to lapse over time. Similarly, fasting on the *Amavasya*, *Poornima*, *Ekadashi*, and *Sankat Choram* and *Sankranti*—a common affair in Brahmin communities elsewhere—are slowly being abandoned. This may have to do with the fact that as more women join the work force outside the home, there is less time available to them as in earlier times, for the very tedious time-consuming preparations entailed in pre-fast ritual cleansing of the kitchen and hearth, as well as preparation of the ritual food for the fast.

The mass dispersal of the Pandits from the Valley in 1989–90 had resulted in the curtailing of these festivals in the following years. Despite the dire problems with visits to and worship in

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the various shrines, today there is an increasing trend of large numbers of Pandits, and the few who still live in the Valley, to return to worship there. This has been facilitated by the fact that now the Indian paramilitary forces are responsible for the security and maintenance of these shrines. The early years of militancy had seen the desecration of some of these including the Ganpathiyar shrine in the heart of Hubba Kadal that was a predominantly Pandit *mohalla*. Today these shrines are probably better maintained than in earlier times. The community owes them a debt of gratitude.

5.3 Rites of Passage

There are several other observances amongst the Kashmiri Pandits which are again the sole concern of the lady of the house. These, in the times of the extended family, include the rites of passage observed not only at the actual birth of a child but following birth. In earlier times, when child birth took place at home with the assistance of a midwife and older women of the household or neighbourhood, the corner of the room where the birth took place was called the *hur*. The Hur Raja was the deity who had to be propitiated with an offering, again, of cooked rice and fish. It is possible that the rice and fish offering may have been the choice because these are readily available throughout the year for a community that lived in close proximity of rivers and lakes.

The occasion of the birth of a child was also an excuse for a feast. The *Shran Sondhar* was the purifactory rite performed on the 5th day (among Kashmiris who had migrated much earlier), and on the 7th or 11th day among the Valley Pandits.

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Earlier too on the 11th day, if the family priest was available, the *namakaran* took place. These days, however, as a matter of convenience, these ceremonies are combined into the *Shran Sondhar* on the 40th day with the ritual bathing of the mother and child and the purification rites to remove the *sutak* of birth from the household. In all these rites, the leaf of the *bhoj* tree is used for purification. It is burnt and waved twice over the head of the mother or the child and then allowed to burn out completely, symbolizing that the *sutak* is removed.

Ann Prashan is the rite associated with the introduction of the cereal rice to the infant's diet. The rice is cooked soft with milk and sugar into a *kheer* and is fed to the child in the fifth month for girls and the sixth month for boys. A very small quantity is fed to the child with a silver spoon out of a small silver bowl. In some orthodox households, this was not done until the child's first birthday. With newer trends and practices, the cereal may be introduced in the child's diet as early as the fourth month. This again is a family occasion presided over by the senior-most woman in the household.

The winter months of severe cold represent a time when a newborn baby is most susceptible to illness. The month of *Paush*, corresponding to January in the western calendar, is the occasion for the *Shishur* ceremony. *Poh*, as the month is known in Kashmiri, is usually a bleak, grey, bitterly cold month. The ancients associated this month with all the natural and supernatural forces of evil. It was their belief that the newborn is particularly susceptible to those forces that prevail during this month and needs protection against them. To this end, during this ceremony, a small piece of brocade is stitched into a

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triangular *singhada* (in the shape of the water chestnut). Enclosed within it are a few mustard seeds, a little *chuna* or slaked lime, with a small piece of iron or a small nail. This *singhada* is then stitched on the top of the child's cap that he would be wearing to protect him from the cold.

A similar ceremony is also performed when a new bride comes into the family. Facing her first *Paush* as a bride, she too is a new individual entering a new life, and as much in need of protection against hostile forces as a young baby. Earlier also with child brides, this was considered essential. Today however, there are no child brides and even though girls are married relatively late, the custom persists. One feature of this occasion is that all who wish to give the bride monetary gifts, put them into a beautifully-decorated *kangri*—the earthen ware willow basketry covered pot with a handle, which is the Kashmiri's lifeline in the bitter cold winter of the Valley. Filled each morning with Chinar leaf coal embers, its smoulders slowly all day long, providing a portable heating system for an individual. The voluminous, unisex *pheran* worn in winter provides ample space within it to carry the *kangri* and keep the person comfortably warm and cosy indoors and out.

Some other rites of passage affecting only women between puberty and menopause, such as *Chandan Shashthi* (the sixth day of the dark fortnight of *Bhadrapada*), have also been abandoned over the past several decades. This required a fast by all women in that age bracket and was only broken at moonrise. Today, some Kashmiri Pandit women living outside the Valley have taken to the *Karva Chauth*, a fast for the well-being of their husbands, but this is not a Kashmiri custom.

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For the male child in a Brahmin family, the next major rite of passage in his life is his *Yagneopavit*. It is the ceremony that initiates him into his life as a Brahmin and is usually performed at the end of early childhood, during which time his mother and other women of the extended family were his principal caregivers. Traditionally this rite would precede the onset of puberty and adolescence, a time that was expected to be a preparation for his future adult role.

During early Vedic times, this ceremony marked the end of the indulgences of his childhood within the household, and the move to the guru's ashram where he would start the study of scriptures. During this period, the youngster was expected to observe *brahmacharya*—a celibate, disciplined life away from his home under the tutelage of his guru, in the relatively more austere conditions in the ashram. It also entailed reverence for and service to his teacher, guru, and the guru's wife.

For the Kashmiri Pandit family of today, the *Yagneopavit* ceremony ends up being almost as elaborate a rite of passage as a young man's marriage. In fact he cannot enter into matrimony without first having his *Yagneopavit* performed. These days most families tend to delay this rite until just before the young man marries. But by right, this initiation should mark the commencement of his studies and training for his adult life and work.

Today, because of the pressures put on the youngster to qualify to compete in the throat-cutting world of work, the *Yagneopavit* is usually postponed till such time as he is ready for marriage. If there are more than one son in the family, usually there is a joint ceremony for all the boys. Often where a girl in

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the extended family is being married off before the sons, the boys' *Yagneopavit* will precede the girl's marriage. The reasons for these practices are many. Convenience is the main consideration. Parents also have to usually gird up their loins to deal with the demands of money, time, and effort needed for these occasions and look to ways of conserving the outgoings in these areas while achieving the best results under the circumstances.

In earlier times such occasions were a particularly trying time for both parents. For the patriarch, getting the whole ceremony planned and put into effect drew on his reserves of ability to manage time, finances, and physical and mental effort. For the mother of the boys, there was the organizational effort on the home front to have everything, so that every phase goes off without any hiccups. The house, in those days, would have to be prepared for the advent of a horde of relatives. In the old days, the attendant ceremonies as well as the main ceremony would spread over days when basically the essential ceremony should not have taken more than a few hours.

The *purohit* or the guruji comes into his own on such occasions and his diktats add to the housewife's woes in the matter of the tea breaks he must take, and only serve to prolong the entire proceedings to suit his own purposes. The basic ceremony does not vary much from the original Vedic ceremony, which is still followed by the Brahmin community elsewhere in the country. The Arya Samajis have reduced the ceremony to its bare essentials with the added bonus that both the would-be *dwija* and his parents and the assembled people have the significance of each step of the ceremony explained to them and the whole ceremony need not take more than three to four hours, unlike

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the needless commotion that accompanies the Kashmiri version that takes up to twenty-four hours from start to finish.

These are the least of the lady's problems. There is, as usual, as on all special occasions in Kashmir, the business of the 'give and take' with the burden falling mainly on the boy's maternal family. There is also the need to have what could only be described as the equivalent of a dowry to be provided as the *dakshina* to the guruji quite apart from the *abheed*—the token cash offering that all attending the ceremony are expected to offer, or rather put into the *thali* that is provided for the purpose by the *havan kund*. Gurujis have been known to delay the final stage of the ritual to await more attendees in aid of collecting more *abheed*. Needless to say, much needs to be done to weed out many such exploitive practices and preserve the sanctity of the occasion. The crucial steps in the ritual are the ones where the youngster(s), with head recently tonsured, accepts the garb and the role of the *brahmachari* and very humbly begs for *bhiksha* from the assembly. The initiation is not complete without the guru giving him the sacred thread which he is expected to wear constantly throughout his life, and which is changed only on his birthday each year. The final step is the accepting of the whispered *Gayatri Mantra*, the most powerful mantra for Hindus, and understanding its significance and use.

In Vedic times, one is given to understand that the girls also had a *Yagneopavit* ceremony. Among the Zoroastrians, even today, both boys and girls have the *Navjoth* ceremony; the word meaning 'new birth'. If one assumes that the Iranian phase in the eastwards migration of the Indo-Europeans was the precursor of their move to the Indian subcontinent and the development of

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the Sanathan Dharma as we know it today, one should not be surprised at the many similarities that exist. The worship of the sun, the focus on the fire in their worship in the *Agiari*, the fire temple, are reflected in the Hindu religion where all sacred rituals centre around the fire and *havan kund*, and the daily worship of the sun by the orthodox and the *Gayatri Mantra* affirm the important life-giving role of the sun in human existence.

One of the most important milestones in a Kashmiri Pandit's life is his marriage. It represents his entry into the most important phase of life—the *grihasthashram*—after his period of training for his adult role in life. As a responsible adult member of the community and family, it is inevitable in a patriarchal society that he marries. There are two basic expectations for this stage in his life. One, that he should marry a girl who would not only give him sons to continue the blood line but secondly, also commit herself to serving her husband, and the then extended family in a totally self-effacing and subservient role. In the process she is expected to shift her loyalty to her marital family and disconnect herself from her own, and abandon her personal development and aspirations.

In earlier times, a girl would barely have reached puberty when the process of finding her a husband would be initiated. This was particularly witnessed in troubled and uncertain times such as the time of the Muslim rulers. At such times, girls and women were kept closely confined to their homes in order not to attract the unwelcome attention of those who would not stop at violent means to abduct young and beautiful women.

The birth of a girl child into a family was not a particularly welcome event and her subsequent treatment was generally

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based on the belief that she was some other family's *amanat*—a commodity practically to be kept safe and virginal until bestowed on her husband's family. This was the attitude prevalent amongst most patriarchal families in India but more so in Kashmir with its long turbulent history of foreign invasions with the resultant insecurities which made the parents of girl children particularly vulnerable.

Finding the right match for the girl involves elaborate and concerted efforts to match lineages and backgrounds of the families. The family priest has a key role to play in this process. When the family initiates a search for a suitable husband for their girl, the *tekni*—the birth chart—is usually passed around by the family guru or the *Manzim Yor*, the middle man; a mutual friend or a member of the community who takes it upon himself to facilitate such matches, often, for a consideration.

Once the *teknis* of the boy and girl are found compatible, the next step in the negotiations between the families is started by the *kath baat* preferably through the medium of the go-between. Unless both parties have and use other means of ascertaining further details of each other's backgrounds, they must depend on the go-between for whatever information they require. Often important facts are concealed or conveniently glossed over in the process.

If the girl's parents are satisfied with whatever they are able to gather about the boy's family, they approach them for the next step that will lead to the marriage. This is the ceremony of *Gandun*, which means literally tying or putting the seal on the approval. Today it is the equivalent of the western custom of engagement ceremony. It is held at the girl's place with a formal

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function. In earlier times this entailed a few members from the boy's family including sisters, sisters-in-law, or near relatives. They bring gifts from the would-be groom's family, clothes for the bride, jewellery with a ring included, and the boy's horoscope in a brocade pouch. The girl's family accepts these and has her change into the clothes and jewellery presented. The ring itself is presented by one of the women. Usually the boy himself is not present at this ceremony.

There is a meal served, generally an elaborate high-tea followed by a presentation of gifts from the girl's family to each of the female relatives present and a whole range of gifts to be sent through them to the would-be groom. These gifts usually include a suit of clothes, a ring, a fountain pen, cash, sweetmeats, and almonds. At the boy's place, the occasion is celebrated with a special meal to which close relatives and friends are invited. They all await the return of the women from the girl's home and the presents they will bring with them.

When it comes to the actual marriage ceremony, it is the privilege of the girl's family to fix a date for the marriage and the venue. Meetings will be conducted between the two families to work out details regarding the number of persons who will accompany the bridegroom as his *baraat*, the duration of their stay depending on whether it will be a day or night *muhurat* for the actual Vedic ceremony, etc. Quite often the two families may not belong to the same town or city and if they come from afar, they will have to be properly accommodated and arrangements made for their comfortable stay for the entire duration until they depart with the bride. This is more common now with the community being scattered, and matches being made

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via matrimonial advertisements in the community's monthly publications or the websites used for such purposes.

At the bride's place the first of the observances in preparation for the marriage is the *Mass Mutsravun*. As per the ritual followed in this ceremony the bride's braided long hair are unravelled and will remain so until the *Dev Gaon*, which is the ritual bath and ceremony immediately prior to the actual wedding ceremony. At the *Mass Mutsravun*, *wer* is prepared in large quantities. This is rice gruel cooked with salt, oil, spices, and broken walnuts, or in earlier times, with chopped lamb liver. It is distributed among all close relatives and neighbours and amounts to an announcement of the forthcoming marriage. Relatives and neighbours who visit on this occasion are entertained with tea and snacks. The *Thumbak Nare*, originally a Persian percussion instrument, is used to play rhythms for the assembled guests who sing joyful songs.

In the old days, as the house filled up with relatives and guests arriving for the wedding, the evenings between the various ceremonies used to reverberate with the sounds of the *Thumbak Nare* and the singing of young and old.

With a houseful of guests to be catered to, during the day there would be enough chores to keep the women folk busy. Much earlier than this, the older women gathered all the spices that would be needed later by the cooks. They would pound them, sieve and make them ready for use. The neighbourhood baker is instructed on the needs for the various types of regular and special breads. Sackfuls of rice are winnowed and picked and are put away in preparation for the occasion. Utensils large enough to cook in, and serve the huge quantities of food are

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brought out of storage, and whatever lacking in the household is borrowed from willing neighbours, with the men folk keeping a careful tally of what was borrowed from whom.

All this was much before the present day practices of hiring a marriage hall and having caterers taking over the preparation of meals for the house-guests and *baraatis*. But even today, those who care will have the *waaza*—professional cook—take over the kitchen and the preparation of the meals to be served at the main functions. The *Mehendi Raat* is one such occasion when a large gathering of relatives and friends of the family and bride will gather to participate in the ceremony and feast, with music and dance following into the early hours of the morning.

Prior to the migration, the meal served at *Mehendi Raat* was one meal that was non-vegetarian, where the *waaza* would prove his worth by serving a wide variety of delectable dishes—*Tabak Maaz, Rogan Gosh, Yakhni* or *Kaliya, Matz, Tsok Sarvan*, Meat *Pulao* for the non-vegetarians; sweet rice *pulao*, Saag, *Tsok Wangan, Paneer Kaliya, Dum Aloo, Wazul Chaman, Muj Chatine, Nadroo Yakhni, Nadur Churma*, for the vegetarians along with mounds of plain boiled rice to be followed by perhaps a *Firni*—a ground rice and milk dessert, saffron flavoured; though Kashmiri Pandits did not generally have a sweet to follow a meal. Stuffed to the gills, guests would retire to the mattresses spread out in the *shamiana* and await the *mehendi* ceremony.

The bride's feet are washed by her maternal aunt, but it is the privilege of the paternal aunt to actually apply *mehendi* on her hands and feet. In the old days, this started with a mere spot of *mehendi* applied to her forehead followed by a blob each on her hands and some on her feet. Today the services of professional

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mehendi artists are used to produce beautiful intricate patterns that decorate not only the girl's hands but go up half-way to her elbow. Similarly, the patterns applied on her feet also run up to the ankle.

The *mehendi* ceremony seems to have been borrowed from the Muslims since it was mostly adopted by the Hindus in the north and had no place in the bridal preparations of southern brides. Today it has become popular in all communities all over India and is caught on in western society too. After the aunt is through with the niece's *mehendi*, she goes around to all the gathered guests, putting some amount of *mehendi* on their hands. In return, she receives a token money gift from each person to whom she has applied *mehendi*.

In the meantime, musicians continue to regale the assembly with traditional wedding songs. In earlier times, there was a *bachha* and his troupe who would entertain guests through the night. But this was not a common affair as this troupe was invited only by the well-to-do families who could afford it. The *bachha*, also a hangover from the Muslim tradition, was a young man dressed up as a woman with a flowing, voluminous skirt and a *dupatta* to cover his head. As he sang and danced to the music provided by his party, he would draw out the host and hostess and other important members of the family and dance with them arousing great hilarity.

Those who could not afford or did not wish to hire a *bachha* for the night's entertainment would be content with the *Thumbak Nare* and the musical talents and repertoire of the family and assembled neighbours and guests. Today, in the post migration period there are Kashmiri Pandit music troupes who

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can be hired for the occasion and they start the evening with an invocation or *bhajan* and proceed to traditional wedding songs. However, at the behest of the younger members, they invariably end up with disco music and latest Hindi movie hits. There is usually a day off for everyone following the *Mehendi Raat* these days to catch up on lost sleep and to prepare for the more serious up-coming ceremonies.

The *Dev Gaon* is the first religious ritual before the marriage. It is an invitation to the Gods to bless the bride and all others who will be performing the religious rituals. Without the *Dev Gaon* no marriage or *Yagneopavit* can be performed. The sanctity of this ritual encompasses only seven days, and if within that time the *lagan* or marriage or *Yagneopavit* is not performed, the ritual has to be repeated. It is usually only the immediate family of the bride, from both maternal and paternal sides, who participate in the ritual with the elders of the family blessing the young girl. A ritual bath is part of the function and involves five unmarried girls or *kanyas*. Four of these hold a veil over the bride's head while the fifth pours a mixture of water, milk, ghee, and sandalwood paste, over her head through the veil.

During this process there is a chanting, the *Wanwun*, by assembled women usually in an adjacent room. Starting with *Henzai*, which is an invocation to the Gods to bless the occasion, it constitutes almost a commentary on the proceedings of the ritual which is conducted by the family priest. While the priest recites the Sanskrit *shlokas*, this commentary is rendered in a droning monotone by the ladies in chorus, with one in the lead. It is rarely that one can follow the actual words which are in Kashmiri, and at best one merely catches names of individuals

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involved in whatever ritual is being performed. The *Wanwun* is performed on every special auspicious occasion.

Following the ritual bath, the bride to be is given a proper bath after which she dresses for the religious ceremony presided over by the family guru. This is the occasion when the maternal uncle presents her with jewellery from his family. The paternal aunt decks the bride with all the jewellery after the *Zang* which is the ritual touching of the bride's left shoulder with a *thali* full of raw rice with token amounts of salt and *wer*, and money which is later taken by the aunt. *Kheer* and *Mungwer* are prepared as offerings during the puja.

The most significant part of the ceremony is the donning of the *Dejhoor*, which is a pair of ornaments threaded onto two strings that are suspended from the pierced cartilage of her ears. These, like the *mangalsutra* elsewhere in India, signify a Kashmiri Pandit woman's marital status. However, at this stage the *Dejhoor* is incomplete, because it lacks the *Atheroo*—the beaded or ornamental tassel that dangles below it and is attached to it only when the bride goes to her husband's home for the first time after the marriage ceremony. The *kheer* which is prepared as an offering is distributed in earthenware vessels as *kheer tok* to the closest relatives after the ceremony is over. All those who attend the ceremony are served a vegetarian meal and this practice continues until the marriage ceremony and marriage feast are over. Usually the *Dev Gaon* is celebrated immediately before the actual wedding ceremony before the arrival of the *baraat* or on the previous day. This is also the day when the outside doorway is ritually cleansed and decorated with coloured floral patterns, with the names of the bride and groom around the door-frame.

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For *lagan* all the preparations have to be completed before the arrival of the groom accompanied by the *baraatis*. In earlier times, the *baraat* was confined to male relatives only, but today it is not unusual to find several female relatives of the groom, mainly younger people, accompanying the *baraat*. The mother of the groom and older women in his family usually stay home to await the arrival of the newly weds when they return. Today's *baraat* arrives with a band and music but this is not a Kashmiri tradition; nor is the long cavalcade of cars with the groom's car decorated with flowers. Undoubtedly, in much earlier times the preferred mode of transport would have been a horse and horse-drawn carriages depending on the social status of the family.

The one common factor which existed in the days gone by and even today is the *Pote Maharaj*—the little boy or youngster who accompanies the Maharaj, that is, the groom, on his ride to the bride's home. He is usually a close relative and is also dressed up like the groom. This practice probably goes back to those uncertain times when the *baraat* might have been waylaid, and the groom killed. The other Maharaj was a possible substitute should such a dire fate befall the groom. However, before the arrival of the *baraat* there are many last minute preparations that must be attended to. The outdoor tented *shamiana* is spruced up and decorated appropriately with carpets and bolsters to receive the *baraatis*. In the old days, there was a special seating arrangement which was richly-decorated and comfortable for the groom and few select members of the *baraat*. Today the dais dominates the space with its two throne-like chairs for the bride and groom. Chairs and sofa have replaced the seating arrangements on the ground.

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A *Vyug*—a colourful circular mandala decorated with coloured powders—is created on the floor outside the entrance to the *mandap*. The bridegroom is supposed to stand on this on arrival, and the bride comes out to garland him. This is the *Ver Mala* ceremony which involves the exchange of floral garlands between the bride and groom.

Last minute supervision is given to the *waazas*, who toil for several hours in preparing the meal for the *baraatis*. The seating arrangement for the *baraat* at meal time and sundry last minute details including ensuring the presence of an impressive array of elderly members of the family and dignitaries to receive the *baraat* outside the venue with garlands are a common affair seen in most weddings.

There are several categories of guests at a girl's wedding. The most important ones are the groom and the accompanying *baraatis*. They are the ones who merit the most careful attention and entertainment from the moment they arrive at the girl's doorstep until they leave with the bride after the ceremony. The second category of guests are those close to the bride's family, relatives and friends who have come from far and near to attend the ceremonies and are living in the house or nearby. These are the ones who receive the *baraat* and see to it that they are well looked after from start to finish. The last category are the invited guests who may arrive just prior to the arrival of the *baraat*, will receive the *baraat*, and will depart after partaking of assorted refreshments but not necessarily the wedding feast.

As soon as the *baraatis* are comfortably seated, light refreshments are served—*Kehva* in cold weather or soft drinks in summer. The groom and his parents are usually fasting until

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after the ceremony is over as also the bride and her parents. A few 'special' guests from among the *baraatis* may be ushered in discreetly into another room where alcoholic beverages are served to them depending on the time of day. Soon it is time for the *baraat* to be served the wedding meal. It is mandatory that this meal should be vegetarian. All this is well before the *muhurat* when the actual wedding ceremony is to be performed. Just prior to that, the bride bedecked in all her bridal finery is led out into the main venue, and then they exchange floral garlands.

Following this, they are seated and await the summons of the presiding Pandits, one from each side, who have earlier made the preliminary preparations at the *havan kund* where the sacred fire, that is the *Agni Sakshi*, is lit. The bride's father is the one who will perform the *Kanyadaan*, that is giving away the bride, but in his absence, his place may be taken by any other male member of his family.

The essential rites during the *lagan* are the original Vedic rites common to Brahmin and Hindu communities elsewhere in the country. There are regional variations in this and the Kashmiris are no exception. Their rituals, whether around a day *muhurat* or a night one, take hours, with interruptions and 'rest' periods for the presiding Pandits and the bride and groom, leading eventually to general exhaustion for those directly involved in the ceremony. Not much heed is paid to the fact that all immediately concerned are fasting, and probably close to collapse from lack of nourishment. However, at the end of the ceremony, the bride and groom will share a *thali* of food that is brought and from which they feed each other mouthfuls amidst much banter and teasing from those around. There is another ploy to break the

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ice and help the newly weds get better acquainted, where a ring is placed in a basin of coloured water and they grope around in it together to find it. The one who retrieves the ring is expected to be the dominant partner in the marriage.

Finally it is time for the departure of the bride. She has, in the meanwhile, changed into a more elaborate outfit. She leaves her parent's home through a window or a door other than the main door. The women of the household gather to sing doleful songs of farewell which invariably adds to the bride's and her family's sorrow at her departure. The *baraatis* are usually accompanied by a couple of youngsters from the bride's family. Their first stop before they reach his home is a temple. With her goes all her dowry which will be put on display at her in-law's place. In fact, she herself will be on display seated amidst the assembled women there who would assess what she has brought, the clothes she wears, and her jewellery. This will also include not only her own personal effects but presents to her in-laws and the usual dry fruits, sweetmeats and the earthenware vessels full of saffron flavoured curds garnished with dry fruit and silver foil.

The new bride is welcomed into her husband's family at the door in a manner similar to the way in which the groom was welcomed at her father's door by the senior most woman in the family with a *thali* holding a glass of water and some sweetmeats. The glass of water is waved around the head three times and a piece of sweetmeat is offered to her and the same process is repeated by the other members of the welcoming group. She is then ushered into the house to a room, where the rest of the women are assembled. She is soon expected to change into another outfit that her in-laws have ready for her, along with the

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Atheroo that will now be added to her *Dejheroo*. She may also be given more jewellery by way of presents from her in-laws as well as other members of her husband's family.

The *Satraat* is the return visit of the newly weds to the bride's parent's place accompanied by a few younger people from her husband's family. They will have a meal there which will be a lavish non-vegetarian meal, unlike the totally vegetarian meal that was served to the *baraat* the previous day. This becomes another occasion when the groom, the youngsters and servants who have accompanied them are presented gifts. A *Doshala* and a complete set of clothes are presented to the groom; the girl gets another set of clothes and jewellery. Money presents are given to the youngsters and servants. This is now only the start of a year long, if not a life-long, giving of gifts to the groom or his relatives. The couple returns to their home after the meal.

The *Ghar Assun* is the next function. The girl's family invites the groom's family, all close and near relatives and friends to yet another meal. The meal once again is an elaborate non-vegetarian affair, which is usually served late by Kashmiri standards and it is late afternoon before all the guests are served and finally the girl's family eats. The whole purpose of this event is for the two families to get better acquainted. When the bride and groom return after the meal, the usual gifts go with them which include the *Naabad Note*—a spherical ball of sugar candy— almonds and dry fruit, and earthenware pots of yogurt.

The concluding function is the *Phirsaal*, when once again the groom is invited to his in-law's place for another meal. The couple comes once again with children from his family accompanying them. They may decide to stay the night after the feast. Needless

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to say, at the end of all the festivities and celebrations, the bride's family is not only physically and emotionally exhausted but often financially as well.

This is where the community needs to look critically at its own practices and where people who count in the community need to cry a halt to the endless and needless functions by setting an example and refusing to give in to any such social pressures. There is a great deal of the 'keeping up with the Joneses' syndrome and the family wanting to go 'one-up' on others. In this time and day, with one section of the community very well placed and well off, and others definitely down and out, as some migrants still are, there needs to be a more sensible and compassionate approach to this whole 'business', and a concerted attempt made to phase out such pointless and exploitive practices.

The last of the rites of passage in life are the ones pertaining to death. These rites follow the practices in other Brahmin communities elsewhere very closely, though with a few regional variations. The family priest may or may not preside over the death rites.

When death is imminent it is usual to have the person moved to the floor off the bed on, what in the old days, was a *Waggoo*—a grass mat. The last moments are when a few drops of *ganga jal* are offered to the dying person.

After death, a mandatory bath is given to the corpse before the last journey to the cremation grounds. The eldest son is expected to perform the last rites as directed by the priest. Only men accompany the bier to the cremation ground, though today this may also see a change. The son shaves his head and lights the pyre. After cremation, all who accompany the corpse to the

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cremation ground will bathe on returning to the house. The house is, by then, full of mourners, usually close relatives, who will stay through the ten days of mourning. Women and men are segregated, and are expected to be available in the mornings of the *ritz doh*—right days when people come to condole. Women are expected to mourn loudly by beating their chest. Those women who refrain from doing so are considered odd. However, today the situation is changing drastically with a more dignified and quiet form of mourning taking place.

As with every other occasion, superstition still persists and there are *ritz vaars*, right days, for everything including the collection of ashes and days when one can pay a condolence call. These ashes are thereafter taken to a water body and consigned to it. In the old days, it used to be at Shadipur or Gangabal. These days it may be at Hardwar, or any other local river. Throughout the following ten day period, the immediate family and close relatives will fast. A lighted lamp is put outside at the entrance to the house at sunset.

The 11th day is what is known as *Tel* when there are some special preparations made for the departed soul—*halwa, du-werk rotis*, and fish. The 11th and 12th days are when the *Shrad* ceremony is performed with the priest presiding over the ritual to speed the soul on its way. The 13th day is the occasion for *Grai Kadun* or *Challun* when all the clothes, bed linen, etc., that have been in use during this period are washed and the house is cleansed. All the women who had participated in the mourning are given something to drink but not a meal, before they depart. During the entire first year following the death, there is a monthly *Shrad* ceremony performed. The priest must

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receive the customary *daan* following each such ceremony. The *daan* may include an elaborate list of items ranging from a set of clothes to footwear to an umbrella!

Today there are many emancipated families who prefer not to follow tradition in these matters or may follow instructions left by the deceased on how the final rites are to be observed, cutting out all really non-essential ceremonies. These include the myriad ways in which the priests seek to use the event to serve their own purposes and ends. Here again the community needs to be realistic and pragmatic in how it deals with the needs of the occasion. These days no one has the time to spend 13 days on mourning and other rituals. In other parts of the country, even the really orthodox Brahmins and priests have cut these down to the minimum without marring the sanctity of the occasion for the family. There is no reason why this should not be done by the Kashmiris as well.

5.4 Language of the Gods: From Sanskrit to Kashmiri

An important component of any culture is the language of the people. Language is the unique human method of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of verbal and written symbols. To the Brahmin, the study of Sanskrit and the language of the *Vedas* are of utmost importance. Without these, his standing as a teacher of the scriptures and as a priest is jeopardized. Education, especially of the male members of the community, embracing the study of Sanskrit language and the *Vedas* and scriptures was of primary concern. In pre-Islamic

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times in Kashmir, this was undertaken under the guidance of the guru in his ashram or the patriarch at home, following a son's *Yagneopavit*. Education has always been greatly valued in the Pandit community and in those early times it was not unusual to find girls in the family also getting the benefit of such education. *Pandita Gargi* was one such example from those early times.

The development of the Kashmiri language, as we know it today, came about through the many influences that Sanskrit was subjected to.

Udayana or Gandhara, in what was Eastern Iran in the pre-Christian era, was the corridor into India in ancient times. Placed as it is at the cross roads of the East-West Silk Route, and lying between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, it was also the point at which the original tribes from the Caucasus met the Mongol race. In fact, this region, which saw many migrations and invasions, became a virtual melting pot of multiple ethnicities. By the time the Caucasians reached this area in their long transition and had stayed there for a long period, they were identified as the Aryans. It was in this area that the Aryans split into two groups—one was the Iranians who continued to inhabit the place and the other were the Indo-Aryans who ventured into India.

According to Pandit Ranjit Sitaram, the oldest forms of Indo-Aryan speech closely resembled the earliest Iranian speech. He goes on to state that the Iranian language of the *Avesta* closely resembled Vedic Sanskrit in some of its passages. In fact, it would need an application of a few rules of phonetics to be read as Vedic Sanskrit. This was the very earliest form of Sanskrit used by the Indo-Aryans when they migrated to Punjab initially, and later to

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the fertile Indo-Gangetic region. The *Rig Veda* was believed to have been composed in this phase of their transition. The reach of their Sanskrit language was from the Indus to Prayag.

Panini, the illustrious grammarian from Gandhara, refined the language that was named Sanskrit meaning 'refined', to distinguish it from the folk speech of this region along with the other Indo-Aryan dialects that had developed in other parts of India. Sanskrit was the dominant language of culture in Gandhara and Punjab until the 11th Century. In Kashmir, it continued as the official language even up to the 14th Century during the rule of the early Sultans.

Apabrahmasa, meaning corrupt or decayed, was the term applied to the dialects that by then developed (namely Pushto and Kashmiri) among others wherever Aryans had settled in the Indian subcontinent. The other languages include: *Saurasena* (Punjabi and Western Hindi); *Avanta* (Rajasthan); *Gaurjara* (Gujarat); *Ardha Magadha* (Eastern Hindi); *Vracala* (Sindhi); *Maharashtri* (Marathi); *Magadha* (Bihari, Bengali and Oriya). These evolved into the present modern languages in these areas.

These languages were grouped under Prakrit, meaning unrefined, unlike Sanskrit and Pali which were used for literature. As the language of the Brahmin priests, Sanskrit became the language of religion and the vast body of literature that this elitist group produced and spoke during their stay in this region. With the spread of the Aryans and their influence in ever widening regions through India, the regional languages and dialects that developed in those areas were considered less cultured, even vulgar by the standards of these "Gods of the Earth". Their written script was *Brahmi*, a precursor to *Devnagari*, and written from left to right.

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There is evidence from the time of Ashoka that prove the existence of two scripts that were current—the *Brahmi*, and *Kharoshthi*, which was written from right to left. Coins of the period recovered from the Jalandhar district show the use of both these scripts. *Kharoshthi* had been introduced in India during the time of the Iranian King Darius (521–485 BC) when both Gandhara and Punjab were provinces of Iran.

Kharoshthi itself was an adaptation of the Aramaic script, the language of Aram or Syria, and a northern branch of the Semitic family of languages to which Hebrew is also related. This would only serve to show the wide range of linguistic influences which were prevalent at the time in India and the extent of the spread of these influences. Both *Brahmi* and *Kharoshthi* were also found on rock inscriptions in the Kangra Valley. The use of the latter language continued up to the middle of the 4th Century AD, testifying to the Iranian influence until then. However, with the Greeks, Parthians and Scythians establishing their rules over the entire north-west of India, the language gradually disappeared to be replaced totally by Sanskrit.

Thereafter, Sanskrit developed further and flourished in the Indian subcontinent. The *Vedas* which were written around this time paved the way for the new religion which was a variation of the old religion of the Iranian phase. It was the Sanatana Dharma, with its *Varna Vibhaga*, the caste system which formed the bedrock of Hinduism as we know it now. The term 'Hindu' came from the Persians and Arabs at a later date in their reference to the people who lived in the region of the river Sindhu (Indus). However, the earliest civilization in this region was Dravidian, both pre-Vedic and pre-Sanskritic, and its stands to reason that the basis of Hinduism came from

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outside the Indian subcontinent brought by the Aryans who overwhelmed the indigenous peoples with their horses (never before seen in peninsular India in pre-Vedic times), their superior technology and philosophy.

The first major phase in the development of Sanskrit into Kashmiri came with the spread of Buddhism in all directions from its origin in the region of Vaishali. It was facilitated by the conquests of the Emperor Ashoka, who had extended his empire in the north-west beyond the Himalayas. Following his own conversion to Buddhism in the aftermath of the Kalinga war, he undertook a mission to spread the message of the Buddha through all the territories where the Indian influence had spread. His missionaries carried the message of Buddhism by land to the territories situated in the north and north-west of the subcontinent and throughout it. By sea, he sent his sister on a mission to Lanka. His missionaries carried Buddhist teachings to South and South-East Asia where trade links had already established thriving Hindu colonies. At that time, the original Buddhist texts were in Pali, the language of Magadha where the new religion came into being.

It was following Ashoka's time that Kanishka sent missionaries to carry the Buddhist message to the East along the Silk Route. It was under these Buddhist Kushans that Sanskrit, which until then was the monopoly of the Brahmins, became the language of their empire, and the language of international communication. Sanskrit gradually replaced Pali, and through its medium Buddhism spread throughout Central Asia and China.

Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Fa-Hien, travelled extensively through Central Asia and Afghanistan and states that the entire region was a Buddhist territory. Starting from the time when Buddhism was firmly rooted in Kashmir, and continuing

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through later times during which many foreign invasions and influences came in their wake, the language changed in phases. The Islamic, Sikh, and Dogra influences in the wake of those periods of Kashmir history, and finally, the introduction of western influences in the 20th Century, brought missionaries and new languages which impacted on the form of the original language and resulted in its development into something entirely different. This gave birth to the Kashmiri language.

With the rise of Buddhism, Sanskrit lost its importance with the advent of Pali and Prakrit. Kashmir became an important centre of Buddhist learning, centred at Sadhavana (now Harwan) on the outskirts of Srinagar. This centre drew scholars from far and wide, most notable among them being Nagarjuna, from what is now Andhra Pradesh. As Buddhism and its scholars spread from this centre to Central Asia and to the eastern limits of Asia to Mongolia and China, there was also an influx of scholars and travellers from these places to Kashmir. The ancient trade routes over land by the Silk Route to the East and West, as well as the trade routes by sea from the peninsula brought about a growing interaction and exchange between cultures and people that brought about changes not only in the written and spoken language but other major influences into Kashmiri cultural expression and everyday living. These continued into later times with the influx of the Sufi Sayeds from Persia and other Islamic influences—Turkish and Arabic—which brought about changes in the Sanskrit language in Kashmir, resulting in its hybridized form, Kashmiri. Persian, Arabic and other phrases were gradually absorbed into the language; the written script also saw changes to the Sharda script which evolved out of Prakrit. By the 11th Century, pure Sanskrit had devolved into its corrupted form

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(Kashmiri) which became the language of the common people then, and continues to this day.

In fact by the time of Lal Ded in the 14th Century, and with the advent of the Persian-speaking Sufis into the Valley, Kashmiri which was written in Sharda script became the language spoken and used by all Kashmiris. This becomes evident from the mystical creative expressions of Lal Ded in her *Vaakhs*. Those who have chronicled those times and her sayings a little later do not mention earlier works in the language. The richness and imagery of her *Vaakhs* in the hybridized language offers a timeless appeal and voice to the ordinary Kashmiri even down to the present times. This is evidenced by the fact that even today her *Vaakhs* are part of their common everyday parlance. Both communities, Muslims and Pandits, claim her as their own.

Under the Kashmiri Muslim rulers, the Persian script and language replaced Kashmiri as it became the official language of the court. It was during this period that a section of the community opted to work in these courts and took to the study of Persian. The Gaurs and Karkuns resulted from this split; the Gaurs confined to the study of Sanskrit and the *Vedas*, and to the performance of religious rites in temples and at home; and the Karkuns opted to enter bureaucracy. This situation continued until recent times. At this point, the study of Sanskrit and the scriptures became confined to a small number of Brahmin priests.

In earlier times, the women belonging to better economic classes were well versed in Sanskrit. But changing times and changing circumstances made them victims in the wake of their men folk taking to the study of Persian, and later yet, to Urdu and English. More and more Kashmiri Pandit men forsook their traditional roles as teachers and priests and took employment

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in the courts and administration of their rulers. This led to the subsequent neglect of Sanskrit as well as Kashmiri.

Most women found themselves limited to a mere knowledge of spoken Kashmiri. It is only in recent decades that they have acquired Urdu, Hindi, or English. With this the woman's role in the home as the first teacher of the young child was also eroded and usurped by educational agencies outside the home. By now the guru had since long ceased to be the teacher. In the earlier times of the Hindu kings of Kashmir, there was a rigid code of conduct to encompass every part of the Brahmin's life. The guru and the patriarch had an important part in enforcing it and explaining to the younger generation the need for the study of scriptures, and the place of ritual in their day-to-day life.

5.5 Education

The village *Pathshala*, run by the village priest, replaced the ashram and the guru of ancient times. When political events and persecution prevented education for the Brahmin youth, it was taken over by the head of the family within the home. In urban areas any kind of schools could only come into existence through the benevolence and patronage of the ruler. And with rulers who were inimical to the Brahmin community, it obviously meant reduction of these educational facilities to the minimum.

Women and girls had no part in any educational process either as mentors or students. In fact there were times in the history of Kashmir when women in the family were cloistered within the four walls of the home to prevent their exposure to the elements who might take advantage of them. This was

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particularly so in the time of the Pathan and Afghan rulers. The general sense of insecurity of the community during such times also did not lend itself to the high levels of scholarship that had characterized them in earlier and ancient times.

When the community discovered the value of learning Persian and bifurcated into the Karkuns and Gaurs, the study of Sanskrit received priority only among the latter class, that is, the priests. As more and more people belonging to the Karkun class took to service in the courts of rulers and in public offices, their mastery of Persian and their knowledge of Sanskrit and the Sharda script helped them make their presence felt in such positions.

Most old documents particularly referring to land records and deeds were in the Sharda script and needed translation into Persian which was the current court language. Their knowledge and skill with handling numbers and monetary transactions helped them find positions in the land revenue departments of the state. Their astute minds and careful diplomacy enabled them to reach important positions as advisors, *Vazirs* to the foreign rulers, whether Afghan, Sikh, or Dogra.

It is important at this juncture to understand the position of the Pandit community in the revised context of the later Dogra rule in Kashmir from 1846 to 1947. With the ascent to the *gaddi* of Gulab Singh, the first Dogra ruler, following the treaty of 1846, the earlier position of the Pandits in the administrative services at various levels was taken over by a number of Punjabis who came into the state—notably the Dewans of Emanabad—as advisors to the Maharaja.

Following the appointment of Jwala Sahai, the first of such advisors, as prime minister brought waves of Punjabi settlers who

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were encouraged with extensive grants of land and positions of trust and power by the ruler to settle in the state. The result was that both the Kashmiri Muslims and the Pandits found themselves relegated to the background. At that time the Jammu Dogra mostly went into the army and did not particularly find a place in the administration. Jwala Sahai replaced the then incumbent prime minister, Pandit Tilak Chand Munshi. With this shift, other Pandits were eased out of most offices. The exceptions were those who maintained land records and village school masters.

Among measures taken by the Maharaja was the resumption of some of the *jagirs* granted to Pandits in earlier times. This led to a great deal of resentment and a complaint being sent to the British authorities at Delhi. A commission headed by an Englishman was appointed to look into the situation and for a while the Pandits were able to secure some favours which, however, did not last long. Though earlier, Muslims had an established place as traders and exporters of Kashmiri products, soon trade and commerce came to be dominated by the Punjabi Khatris.

With Gulab Singh's death in 1857, his son Ranbir Singh succeeded him and proved to be a better ruler than his father. He invited many Kashmiri Pandits, who had earlier migrated from the Valley and had made their mark elsewhere in the country, to return to Kashmir. These were people who had been away for more than a century and though they had retained their original traditions and customs, many radical changes were seen in their dress and the language they spoke. They no longer spoke Kashmiri. One such person was Raja Dina Nath, who was appointed as Governor of Kashmir.

It was during this time that there was a crisis in the Kashmir shawl industry following the defeat of France in the Franco-

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Prussian War of 1870. Until that time, the French had been the best of the European patrons of the shawl industry and suddenly there was a sharp slump in the shawl trade. Earlier French traders had their agents in Kashmir, which had exposed the local population to European culture and literature. Until then, Kashmiri Pandits had merely been masters of Persian and Sanskrit. Now they felt the need to acquire other languages such as English, French, and Latin. Pandit Ram Joo Dhar, then Diwan-e-Maal, was the first to study these languages but was reluctant to let his own community members share the privilege, no doubt, for his own selfish motives.

Pandit Har Gopal Dar was a Kashmiri Pandit who had served in Punjab and had returned to Kashmir. The British authorities had used his services and he soon assumed leadership of the generally demoralized Pandit community. The British were at that time attempting to gain a foothold in Kashmir as part of their attempt to counter the growing influence of Tsarist Russia in the North-West. The Maharaja, himself was making strong attempts to restrict the entry of Europeans into the state and to deny them facilities for trade. Christian missionaries also were discouraged or banned. The Maharaja, therefore, probably suspected that Pandit Har Gopal was working in the British interest. After a confrontation in the open durbar with a British officer, Pandit Har Gopal and his brother were incarcerated in Bahu Fort, though not for long. They were able to escape to British-held territory in Sialkot from where they published a newspaper strongly criticizing the Kashmir Durbar. Soon, however, they were invited to return to Kashmir. This change resulted in Kashmiri Pandits regaining

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some of their earlier status, following which, they assisted the then Diwan Kripa Ram Sahai in producing a report on the Kashmir Valley in 1870.

Maharaja Ranbir Singh was succeeded in 1885 by his son Maharaja Pratap Singh. It was during his reign that for the first time the British changed their policy of non-interference in Kashmir affairs, and appointed a resident at Srinagar. Following this, a case of treason was brought against the Maharaja, who was deposed and a governing council constituted to administer Kashmir. Raja Suraj Kaul, a Kashmiri Pandit from Lahore, was appointed revenue member of the council. However, this step taken by the British resident to depose the Maharaja was treated as an outrage throughout British India. The cause of the Maharaja was taken up by a vernacular paper of Lahore, run by a Kashmiri Pandit, Pandit Gopi Nath Kaul, and with the intercession of yet another Pandit, Ved Lal Dar, the Maharaja's powers was partially restored, but with the assistance of the council under Pandit Suraj Kaul. This was when Sir Walter Lawrence was appointed as Land Settlement Officer and he took on a number of Kashmiri Pandits to work under him.

It was during this time that a college was established in Jammu. A Kashmiri Pandit, Daya Kishan Kaul, who was the Maharaja's private secretary, mooted the idea of a college at Srinagar with private initiative. With the introduction of English in the administrative service, a growing need was felt by the community to receive a modern education that would enable them to serve in such administrative positions. Until then these were mainly filled by people from outside the state. However, the proposal was not only opposed by the outsiders but also by one

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of the council members who was of the opinion that it would be unwise 'for frontier people to receive higher education'.

It was the initiative of Daya Kishan Kaul, along with the cooperation of other Pandits, and with the encouragement of Mrs Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society, that resulted in the opening of a college, Sri Pratap Hindu College at Srinagar. Pandit boys flocked to the new college and the first batch graduated in 1911. This led them to an ever-increasing place in all departments, encouraged by British officers.

With the increasing western influence following consolidation of British rule in India, though Kashmir was never directly ruled by the British but under the Dogra Maharajas, the presence of the British resident in the state made it easier for the first Christian missionaries—Moravian, Anglican, and Roman Catholic—to establish the first schools on British pattern in the state. Initially in 1881, these schools were for boys, followed in the 1890s by a missionary school for girls. The last Dogra rulers of the state, Maharajas Pratap Singh and Hari Singh, themselves contributed largely to encouraging the spread of literacy and education among all classes and communities. Schools were established by them in Jammu and Srinagar. This was followed by the establishment of boys' colleges at both places early in the 20th Century.

The Jabri schools established by Maharaja Hari Singh brought those who had earlier been excluded from it or had not opted for it in place of the *Madrassas* into the school system. These were the Muslims who subsequently graduated from the local colleges, as well as the universities outside the state in Punjab and Aligarh, and later took their place in the post-Partition period as politicians and leaders of the people. Where women's formal

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education was concerned, it was not until the first quarter of the 20th Century that girls ventured out of their homes for the first time to avail of the schools that were opened for them by missionaries and social activists.

One needs to carefully examine the situation regarding the education of Kashmiri Pandit girls at the onset of the 20th Century. While the need for formally educating girls from the rural agrarian families did not arise at all, in the urban areas and even in Srinagar, the preoccupation and priorities of Pandit families was to ensure that their sons were sufficiently educated to take up administrative positions, even clerical posts in government offices. Earlier their mastery of Persian and Urdu had ensured this but with the shift to English as the language of officialdom, their main concern was to give them a sound grounding in that language. The opening of the missionary schools and later those by the government provided welcome opportunities to Pandit boys to gain that much-needed education. Later when the means for higher education were not readily available to them, their religious orthodoxy stood in the way of these young men going outside the state. However, the Punjabi families—both Hindu and Muslim—did not hesitate to send their young men and even women to avail of the facilities for higher education at Lahore.

In those days Punjab, like most of British-ruled India, had excellent higher education facilities for both men and women. These were manned by dedicated men and women educators (mainly Christian missionaries) from Britain and elsewhere. It was not until Sri Pratap College for boys was opened in Srinagar that the young Pandit men flocked to it. The first batch of

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graduates passed out in 1911, and were ready for post-graduate studies outside the state. A change in perspective had been brought about in the community by the political events in the Valley following the anti-Maharaja campaign spearheaded by a few Muslims who had had exposure to the events on the larger national scene.

This was the beginning of the Independence movement in India led by Gandhiji against the British. This freedom struggle culminated in the Partition of the country and the final exit made by the British. In the freedom movement, women were out on the streets; shoulder to shoulder with their men folk at a time when Kashmiri women were still cloistered in their homes. That changed in 1931 when demonstrations against the Maharaja took place and women joined men on the streets of Srinagar for the first time. Though later they were not given the same role in decision-making and were relegated to the background, that experience revealed their own potential to them.

When the first missionary schools were opened for girls, their students were mainly Punjabi Hindu and Muslim, and Ladakhi girls. But there were few takers among the Kashmiri Pandit families. When the government opened schools for girls following the success of the missionaries, the question that they faced was who would educate the girls. Female educators were few, and the male educators who were initially appointed were not acceptable to conservative families. A courageous step was taken by Pandit Har Gopal, who allowed his daughter (who had been widowed in childhood) to be educated. Tekri stepped in as a teacher for Pandit girls in the first schools for them. She was popularly known as Tekri 'Masterani'. With some exceptions,

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Pandit girls even as late as forties and early fifties were educated at home wherever their families felt the need for it.

Following the events of 1931, which had adversely affected a section of the Kashmiri Pandits of Srinagar, a few public-spirited men of the community got together and attempted to remedy some of the social ills that were the bane of the community. These included illiteracy, child marriage, taboos against widow remarriage and other practices. One of their priorities was female education. A Women's Welfare Trust was created which established a network of schools for the women of the community, of which Vasanta High School was the first one in the city community. Gouri Kaul, wife of the late D N Kaul (who rose in the ranks of the Kashmir force as the first IGP) took up the position of the first Kashmiri Pandit head mistress of Vasanta High School. Nanhi, who adopted Shiv Narain Fotedar (Speaker of the Assembly in the 50s), was the first Pandit girl of the school.

In 1933 the community worked for the Widow Remarriage Act. They were also responsible for bringing about a change of dress for women from the earlier traditional *pheran* to saree, the garb of the new Indian woman. In the forties, they worked hard to abolish dowry and wasteful expenditure on marriages. These latter efforts, however, did not yield results that lasted.

With Partition came the onslaught from across the border of the armed tribals from the North-West Frontier Province with the tacit consent and support of the new nation's army. After considerable procrastination on his part, this resulted in the Maharaja's accession to the Indian Union. On the advice of the Indian government, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah of the

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National Conference headed the newly-installed government. In 1944 this party had adopted the 'Naya Kashmir' framework for their future policies and action.

A radical change was envisaged for women in the Women's Charter which was expected to empower women by creating equality of opportunity for them. This was incorporated into the Jammu & Kashmir Constitution in 1956 in Section 22. This step provided the portal for women to enter the mainstream of all areas of social, economic, and political life of the state.

The first Government Women's College in Srinagar came into being in 1950 under the leadership of Miss Shaw, until it was later taken over by Miss Mehmooda Ahmed Ali Shah. Under Miss Shah it developed into a premier women's institution of higher education in the state. Until the events of 1989–90, it saw thousands of young girls pass through it. These girls had a plethora of opportunities open to them by courses offered therein. Prior to the establishment of this college, women who wanted to pursue higher education after matriculating had to enrol in the boys' colleges. Among such women was the first Kashmiri Pandit, Kamla Zadoo, who led the way for others in the community to undertake college study. After her marriage, she moved to Lahore with her husband, and became the first Kashmiri Pandit woman to enrol in a postgraduate degree at the University at a missionary-run college.

During the tail end of the Dogra rule, Kashmiri Pandit women belonging to emancipated families pioneered the entry of other Pandit women into the educational system of the time. They were among the very few who enrolled in boys' colleges. After Independence, with the 'Naya Kashmir' movement, they

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were joined by their Muslim sisters who flocked to schools, colleges and later the university to avail of free education which was offered up to the post graduate level. This was the situation until the onset of militancy and the widespread destruction of government schools and other educational institutions all over the Valley. The mass migration of school, college, and university teachers (mostly Pandits) out of the Valley added to the negation of much that had been achieved over the latter half of the century.

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SIX

Changing Times

"Every generation has its own preoccupations and concerns and therefore looks for new things in the past and ask different questions... our standard texts dealt with political and economic history. There is little social history and certainly no gender history. The first wave of feminism in the late 1960s produced an interest in women's history.

"The disappearance of the European empires and the rise of Asia in economic and political power have produced global history less centred on Europe and North America. That process of researching and writing about new questions we ask of the past is what makes history change and develop.

"Nevertheless, there is an irreducible core in the story of the past and that is: what happened and in what order? Causality and sequence are crucial to understanding the past."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History*, (2008), pp 37, 38

6.1 Kashmiri Women's Role and Concerns

What the community represents today is a composite ever-changing culture that has been modified as a result of its interface with other cultures, religions, people and places over its long history. How this affected the status and role of the women of the community as the custodians or arbiters of its culture needs to

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be examined. Women, traditionally, have been the homemakers concerned with the basics of life and living. By their very biological nature, they bring forth new life ensuring the continuity of the blood line and race. They are the ones who nurture the offspring and are concerned with the daily needs of the family which include food, clothing, care and maintenance of the home.

For the Kashmiri Brahmin family, much changed with their move from the plains of India to the Kashmir Valley. In the initial stage of the move, their stay in the Valley was only for part of the year, through the comfortable months of late spring, summer and early autumn. The severe winter months saw them move back to warmer areas not merely to avoid the rigours of the Kashmiri winters but also to escape the onslaughts and ravages of the tribes that came down from the northern mountains to the Valley during this time.

The Aryans had come into the Valley after negotiating with Nila, the leader of the indigenous Nagas of the Valley, who were the descendants of the Mon-Khmer group of people. When the Aryans came into the Valley from the southern plains, there was an influx of the Pishachas into the Valley from the north-west. Initially there were conflicts between the Nagas and both the Aryans and the Pishachas. This information is provided to us by the *Nilamat Purana*. The conflicts were finally resolved under the leadership of Kashyapa. With the passage of time and acclimatization, the Aryans made a permanent settlement in the Valley. With the draining of the Satisar, more cultivable land was available for all—Nagas, Aryans and Pishachas. The superior technology and social structure of the Aryans helped to establish their superiority over the tribal Nagas and Pishachas.

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The Aryans brought with them the *Chaturvarna* or their caste system, which placed the Brahmins at the top of this class hierarchy. As the privileged class whose function was to teach, perform religious ceremonies and sacrifices, and accept gifts in recognition of the services rendered to the larger community, they enjoyed immunities and concessions; they were exempt from taxes and capital punishment and crimes against them were considered serious offence. The king was expected to support them. As such, as with their counterparts elsewhere in India, the Brahmin occupied an honoured position in society. The vast majority of them were engaged in the study of scriptures and were priests or teachers. They also took up the study of astronomy, astrology and history. Kashmir is the only place in the world that has the longest recorded history. These were their main callings during the early period, and provided them with their livelihood.

Besides the sacrificial fees and gifts of sorts, the main source of their income was the revenue derived from the *agraharas* donated by the rulers and wealthy patrons. The *Nilamat Purana* refers to them as "Gods of the Earth". The lives of the Brahmins, at least that of the men, involved little manual work. They enjoyed their position at the expense of the working population. This created a deep sense of inequity among other sections of the population. The rules of conducts for the other *varnas* were also laid down by the Brahmins. But even Brahmins had to follow a code of conduct and those who broke these rules were severely punished by kings.

However, how did this life of privilege of Kashmiri Brahmins affect the women of the community? For them, the move to the Valley brought major changes in their earlier life style. In the

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relatively more severe conditions of the new environment, there was a need to adapt to all the new factors and influences in the environment. This burdened the women more by increasing hardships in every walk of their life.

All of these factors changed even the basics of every day life—food, clothing, and shelter. All these are areas of women's concerns. Unlike their Brahmin counterparts elsewhere, the Kashmiri Brahmin's food habits have also undergone changes. His diet now includes meat and fish, probably arising out of a need to survive on whatever was available throughout the year in a climate that allowed only one short summer growing season for cereals, vegetables and fruits. Meat and fish also constitute sources of the much-needed nourishment to sustain them through the rigours of severe wintery conditions.

The processes by which foods were stored and preserved for use throughout the year became an added concern for the women: the dehydration or sun-drying of vegetables and fruits; the smoking of fish; the cooling of foods in cold waters of the wells and swift flowing rivers; burying in underground pits of root vegetables for use through the exacting demands of climate and environment.

Clothing (the fabrics used, and the styles) for both men and women were distinctive and different from those found elsewhere in the country among the Brahmins. The choice of fabric depended on the availability of wool and its suitability as a protection from the cold through winters which constitute the greater part of the year. The styles for both men and women were influenced by what provided comfort and convenience and was current and acceptable during a particular period of history. The *pheran* is one such versatile unisex garment.

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Similarly, depending on whether the Kashmiri Pandit was an urban or rural dweller, and his occupation, his daily routine and way of life was a reflection of his work and where he lived. The woman's daily routine and chores—her main preoccupation—reflected the needs of the then extended family in either the urban or rural milieu. Nurturing the children in their formative years was her exclusive field, as well as caring for and the well-being of the several generations that constituted the extended family unit. Here women in their various roles as daughter, wife and mother played the major role with little help or participation of the men folk. Even in the seasonal agricultural operations, rural women folk made sizeable contributions adding to their usual work and responsibilities. In both urban and rural areas, fetching water throughout the year for the household's requirements was a major chore before the advent of piped-in supplies. There was little rest or respite for the women.

In her various roles in the family she had to change and adapt to changing situations. This ability was vital to the well-being of her family and community. To this end, she had to bend to the buffeting of not just her physical environment but to the pressures on her from the people in her life—the patriarch, the husband, the sons, the priest and sundry other persons within and outside her family circle.

In any society, the early and most crucial developmental years of the child are the special responsibility of the mother. In the Kashmiri, Brahmanical, male-centered society of the Valley too, this was the case until recent times. Till the time the boy's *Yagneopavit* marked his entry into the *Brahmachari* stage, and the end of his childhood, his mother was his principle care-giver. After

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his *Yagneopavit*—an important rite of passage which signifies his *dwija* or twice-born status as a Brahmin—the entire process of his education and training became the responsibility of his *guru* whose *ashram* he entered for this phase of his life. This prepared him for the next phase of his life, that is, the *grahast ashram* where he leads the life of a responsible adult member of the community.

These conditions probably prevailed in their original form only as long as Kashmir remained under Hindu dynasties. With the advent of Buddhism under Ashoka and Kanishka, and later, under the Muslim rulers and the Sikh and Dogra rulers, and finally with the British interventions in Kashmir, there were radical changes in both Kashmiri Pandit society and its culture. Every invasion or incursion of outsiders into Kashmir left a deep mark on the land, its people and their culture. Religious influences, whether of Buddhism or Islam or later of Christianity, changed their language, food habits, art forms and the customs and rites of passage that were until then unique to the community.

The community itself was reduced in number with voluntary conversions to Buddhism or forcible conversions to Islam under bigoted rulers. From a wholly majority Hindu community, they were reduced to a minority Brahmin community. It was during oppressive times that many Muslim customs were either forced on the community or taken up by them to protect themselves. Amongst these was the segregation of the women, restricting their movements outside the household, and the Purdah to shield them from exposure to other men. In pre-Islamic times, there were no such restrictions on women. The better classes of women then had the benefit of education. Women went about unveiled and participated in social events and public celebrations along with their men folk.

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The beauty of the women folk exposed them to exploitation. It is said that conquering forces abducted them and sent them as presents to their compatriots in Afghanistan and Persia. It was also following this time that it became necessary for the remaining Pandit families in the Valley to go in search of brides from outside Kashmir. These women undoubtedly brought with them their own value systems and culture to meld with the original one. Probably, Vaishnavism under rulers like Avantivarman, who built temples for Vishnu in the Valley, must have come from these sources and led to the tempering of many customs, rituals and rites of passage. One assumes that the eschewing of non-vegetarian foods in the diet, if not on a daily basis, but at least on special days like the *ashtami* and *poornami* and special festivals was the result of such influences. Such external influences manifest themselves even today in the present post-migration phase when one notices the exhortations by the priests in the community's almanacs to stop eating meat; a concession, no doubt, to the sensitivities to the larger vegetarian Brahmin and other communities amongst whom they now live.

6.2 Outstanding Kashmiri Women

Though there have been Kashmiri Pandit women from the earliest times who have been outstanding, it is important to remember that even during the best periods of history when they enjoyed a relatively good status in their society, there were serious limitations to the conditions under which they lived. The rigid patriarchal structure of their social condition as also the external circumstances in which they lived determines this whether they were the exigencies arising out of the unfavourable

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physical environment, political climate or calamitous events of history.

In their patriarchal society, Kashmiri Pandits have always treated women as lesser beings whether as mother, wife, daughter, or daughter-in-law. Manu, the law-giver, very plainly places her position in the family as subservient to the male, whether as a daughter, a wife, or as a widow dependent on her adult sons. The birth of a daughter was not always a welcome event as was the birth of sons in the family. There was always discrimination between the two as they grew up in matters of care and nurture, nutrition and education with very few exceptions to this general rule.

Through all the transitions that the community has faced in its long history, it is difficult to visualize a time when the Kashmiri Pandit woman was not a victim of grave injustice and tyranny, used and even abused by the men in her life; to say nothing of the family priest and his insistence on what should be or not in the daily rituals and routines and also in the special rites and ceremonies that marked the rites of passage through life. Despite these burdens to which she had been subjected, she has survived, often by being meekly subservient to traditions. Comparatively, in the exclusive Hindu eras of their history, she had an easier time and a better status. As a member of a Brahmin household, she had the benefit of some home education. She had a place by the side of her husband in all the household rites and rituals, which were incomplete without her presence beside him. Her lot worsened with the advent of Islam to the Valley and the persecutions that often marked the reigns of many of their rulers, where her personal expression and movement was curbed by her own men folk in order to protect her.

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However, through the centuries despite the worst conditions, there have been outstanding women—queens, saints and spiritual adepts, social reformers, right down to the pioneering social activists of more recent decades. Through all the vicissitudes that the Kashmiri Pandit woman has faced, she has shown that she has the grit and determination to survive and to carry on old traditions, but also, where the times and circumstances so demanded, to fight against or modify them.

Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* represents the unique record of the reigns of the early kings of Kashmir from the time of the Pandavas and down to his own time, that is, 1149 AD. Though by present day standards for historical research, it may be somewhat lacking, but it is yet a chronicle of the lives and times of those early Hindu rulers of Kashmir. It gives us valuable information about them, their families, and their courts. It includes graphic descriptions about their personal lives, the events and exploits that marked their reigns and it brings to light some significant events that involved some outstanding women. These were their queens who stepped in their stead to rule as consorts or regents or even to lead armies to defend their kingdoms. These were women who despite the stifling circumstances of a strongly paternalistic society and the adversities that beset them were able to rise to the need of the hour and make enough impact on their times to deserve a place in history.

They were not always women of high birth but by virtue of their personalities, intelligence, and courage, they were able to overcome them all and assert themselves where their men had been unable to do so.

Notable among these queens was Yashowati, whose husband Damodara was defeated and died in the Mahabharata war. After

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his death she was crowned queen regent until her son Gonanda II ascended the throne. Another queen who ascended the throne after the deaths of her husband, Shankaravarman, and two heirs in quick succession, was Sugandha Devi who ruled for two years (904–906 AD). She relinquished the throne only when she lost a battle to her powerful opponents, the Tantrins. In memory of her son, she founded a town Gopalpura and built a temple, the ruins of which lie on the outskirts of present day Pattan.

Queen Didda was the consort of Khsemagupta—a dissolute ruler—and was the virtual ruler of Kashmir from 950–1001 AD, first as guardian of her son Abhimanyu, and later as regent for her three grandsons. Though Kalhana has portrayed her as a cruel, ruthless and unscrupulous ruler, she proved to be a capable organizer, a good diplomat and administrator as well as a courageous fighter. She was loved and venerated by her people.

Kota Rani, the last of the Hindu queens and wife of Sahadeva, was undoubtedly the most distinguished of these early queens. Jonaraja, who continued Kalhana's *Rajatarangini,* has high praise for her reign which lasted almost a decade. Living in difficult times, she had to defend her kingdom from invaders and put down rebellions. However, her throne was usurped by Rinchen Shah. In order to retain her influence with her people, she married Rinchen Shah. She helped him rule Kashmir with wisdom and courage during his short reign and brought a time of relative peace and prosperity to it. However, in fighting the invader Uchala, Rinchen Shah was wounded in battle and died after a reign of just three years.

These were a few among other courageous women from the 6th to 12th Centuries. Other women who distinguished themselves in the 12th Century were Silla and Chudda, both

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belonging to warrior-statesmen families and who in their respective times took over command of the army to fight invaders.

Bazaz in his book, *The Daughters of the Vitasta*, has drawn extensively from Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and written at length about the outstanding women of those early times.

However, no narrative about those early Kashmiri women would be complete without a reference to Lal Ded or Lalleshwari and Arnimal and Rupabhavani.

Lal Ded—mystic and spiritual adept—is known to all Kashmiris for her profound and beautiful *Vaaks* in the Kashmiri language. No literary works in this language existed before her time and though she is not known to have written them down, her sayings passed by word of mouth until recorded later, and continue to be compiled even until the present time.

Arnimal is renowned for her poetry. Married to a poet and scholar of the Persian language, her husband abandoned her early in their marriage to hold a position of honour in the court of the Afghan governor of Kashmir. With her poignant poetry, she expressed her yearning for her husband and the sorrow of separation. Unlike Lal Ded's *Vaaks,* there is no mysticism or profound philosophy in her poetry which draws from the beauty of nature around her. Her lyrics too have come down to the present time by word of mouth. They fall under the genre which evolved 200 years earlier by Habba Khatoon—another Kashmiri Muslim poet pining for her exiled husband Yusuf Shah Chak, the last of the Kashmiri rulers.

Rupabhavani was the daughter of a deeply religious Pandit, Madhav Dhar. A child bride of ten, she was married to an equally young husband. She had to undergo harsh treatment at the

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hands of her mother-in-law. Unable to endure it, she returned to her parents and took to religious life. She wandered in search of a mentor whom she met in the form of a Sufi saint. This was Shah Sadiq Qalander, who helped her attain her spiritual goal. To this day, the women of the Dhar family honour her death anniversary by fasting.

What binds these early women together is that all of them were victims of abuse by their husbands or their in-laws, which drove them to abandon their marital homes and seek recourse in spiritual and literary pursuits. They were also women from ordinary families, unlike the queens of yore. It took immense courage on their part to renounce worldly life and seek spiritual succour as they did. Those were not easy times when they lived. They had flouted the norms of the society to which they belonged, to free themselves from the oppressive bondage of marriage. It was their fight for survival in a male-dominated society.

Despite the persecutions, migrations and transitions that it has been subjected to, if this minuscule community survives with an identity and culture, they owe it to these women who have struggled to preserve and transmit them. Through the ages, men have changed much due to the compromises they made. They have lost their original purpose and direction, their language, their erudition and command of their Vedic knowledge and heritage.

In the post-Independence period, the women had the opportunities to step out of their earlier cloistered existence. They had taken up the challenge with the support of the patriarchy, and seized these opportunities and proceeded to empower and prepare themselves. These allowed them to enter the world of work outside their homes.

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In the immediate period prior to the diaspora of 1989–90, it is important to note that Kashmiri Pandit women had reached the heights of their educational aspirations and were found in almost every area of government service. Secondary and higher education, medicine, engineering, hospitality and service industry, and others that offered them the widest scope for employment in the state and outside. Not merely had thousands received the benefits of higher education within the state but an impressive percentage had qualified outside the state and abroad. They had stormed the bastions of male monopoly and established themselves well in their various fields.

This was not merely the case with Pandit women but women from every other community in the three regions of the state. However, the past two decades of socio-economic and political upheavals resulting from the shift from the tolerance and mutual respect of the composite culture that the Valley stood for, to the fundamentalistic beliefs of the pan-Islamic movement played havoc with the status of women. They were terrorized, resulting in the exodus of not merely the Pandits and other Hindus, but sizable numbers of the more moderate elements of all the other communities, in order to escape the terror and mayhem that was let loose on them.

6.3 Post-Independence Period and KP Women

No writing about Kashmiri Pandit women would be complete without my attempting to write about those who have made outstanding contributions to the community and society at large. There have been any number of such women in the post-

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Independence period. However, I would like to limit myself to only a few of them, who in my personal opinion, have made significant contributions not merely in their own fields but also for benefit of the community, particularly following the mass exodus of 1989-90. In limiting myself to the few, I have chosen those whom I have known closely. If I have chosen not to write about others, it is merely because I do not know them well enough to presume to write about them.

My earliest contacts with some of them go back to my meetings with those in my own immediate neighbourhood of Sharika Bhawan in the Civil Lines area of Srinagar, Kashmir. Later there were those whom I had occasion to meet in the course of my working life at various educational institutions after my marriage. These include the two Women's Colleges in Srinagar—at Maulana Azad Road and Nawakadal—and at the Teachers' College with a brief stint at the post graduate Department of Home Science that I helped to establish at Srinagar before my retirement. More recently, a brief assignment as consultant at the University of Jammu put me in touch with others at the post graduate Department of Home Science.

Our small *mohalla*—Sharika Bhawan at Srinagar—was originally a pocket of exclusively Pandit families. Centrally located, yet a very quiet neighbourhood despite its proximity to Maulana Azad Road, Pratap Park and Amira Kadal, it comprised originally of just seven bungalows. Each was set on either side of a double right angled lane, which took off from Exchange Road on the one side, and zigzagged through it to connect it on the other side with the lane running adjacent to the Women's College on Maulana Azad Road (that had earlier been the Mond

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Palace, housing the Dowagers of Dogra dynasty). The sprawling campus of Sri Pratap College lay just behind the Women's College. Across the lane from the Women's College stood the Teachers' College campus with its magnificent Magnolia and Chinar trees and its wide lawns. Having started my career as a college teacher at the former, before being posted to the other one, I returned a few years later to the Teachers' College. Only during my very first posting for a year at the Teachers' Training School for Women at Karan Nagar in 1959–60 and the few years at the Nawakadal Women's College (1961–63) took me far enough away from home, to warrant taking what was, then, the usual mode of transport—the horse-drawn Tonga—to and from Amira Kadal to my destinations.

Most of the families in our neighbourhood were those who had moved away from their original downtown Srinagar extended family homes to live in the Civil Lines area, closer to their workplaces. With this move, which reflected their rather radical approach to life, as well as their social status in the community, they became leaders and pioneers in the movement to empower women in the post-Independence period. In our immediate neighbourhood, we had Prof Jaya Lal Kaul who lived opposite us, with Prof Sham Lal Dhar who lived next to the Kauls; and the Ambardar family who lived next door to the Dhars. Both these professors of English taught at the nearby Sri Pratap College, whereas the senior Ambardar had been Wazir Wazarat in Maharaja Hari Singh's administration. Behind this row of houses and facing Exchange Road on the other side, lived the Bazaz and Bhat families, the former in business. Right beside our house lived the Vasu Dev Zadoos, who were a forward-

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looking family. Latecomers to the *mohalla* were the Lambodar Kauls. Both these families were business-oriented and self-made, tough, and successful in their businesses. They have lasted out the recent years of insurgency, and are still there. Most of the other families have either chosen to move out or been forced to do so by the events of 1989–90.

Many of the outstanding women of this period came from other Pandit families from downtown Srinagar. It was here that in earlier days the old-established and elitist families lived in clustered properties either on the banks of the river Jhelum or near it, in and around the Nawakadal and Ali Kadal areas. The Dhars—several branches of them, some of them related to my mother-in-law—produced some outstanding women.

The heart of the city including Karan Nagar, Bhan Mohalla, Hubba Kadal and Sathu Barbarshah with their concentration of Kashmiri Pandits, all had pioneering women emerge from among their younger generations. These were the families whose men had been among the first Kashmiri Pandit graduates, products of the colleges established in the city in Maharaja Pratap Singh's reign and after. Though their wives and older daughters may not have been formally educated, and some only privately tutored, as soon as there were facilities available for the younger women to attend schools and colleges, they availed of them, even to the extent of sending their girls outside the state and country for further studies and training in their respective fields.

If I am to start with Sharika Bhawan and my own family, my father-in-law, the late Amar Nath Bakshi, had a brilliant academic record, followed by an equally successful though relatively short career. Starting out as a college lecturer at Sri Pratap College,

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he was appointed by Maharaja Hari Singh in recognition of his abilities to his administration, as Wazir Wazarat in several districts of the state: Kathua Reasi, Udhampur, and lastly at Muzzafarabad prior to Partition, before his untimely death at the age of forty-eight. His first wife from the Miskeen family was unlettered, and died after the birth of two children. This necessitated a second marriage to a young woman, also unlettered but belonging to one of the Dhar families of Nawakadal.

His own two daughters did not have the benefit of formal education; the older one being married young into a Jammu family in his lifetime, and the second one married, equally young, into a wealthy land-owning family of Srinagar a year after her father's death. However among his grandchildren, there have been young women who have made their mark in the fields of education, medicine, information technology and in the media, as radio and television artistes.

His eldest son's second wife, Dr Sheila Razdan Bakshi, had the distinction of being the first Kashmiri Pandit woman to graduate from the prestigious Lady Hardinge Medical College for Women at Delhi and of going on for her post graduation in Gynaecology and Obstetrics from the University of Madras before she joined the State Medical Services. My brother-in-law's youngest daughter by his first marriage, Kiran Raina, made her mark by running a very successful school at Shalimar on the outskirts of Srinagar, before their world fell apart with the onset of militancy in 1989–90, and she and her family were forced to migrate out of the Valley to a camp at Muthi on the outskirts of Jammu. The changed circumstances of camp life did not deter her, and realizing the dire need for schooling for youngsters in

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the nearby camps, she stepped into the breach to once again set up her school at Muthi Camp. She has rendered yeoman service to the migrant community with the huge success of her venture, which has over the years expanded, to provide a much needed and appreciated service to the migrant community. Her sister Kusum Dhar, a migrant teacher in the government school system, is a talented radio and TV artiste, who has acted in plays put on by Srinagar and later in Jammu TV stations.

Among the first visitors that I had at Sharika Bhawan within a few days of my marriage, were the grand daughters of Prof Sham Lal Dhar. They were also the grand daughters of the Bhat family living on Exchange Road. Sudha and Neelima Dhar were a pair of lovely young school girls then, with a lively curiosity about this 'outsider' who had married into the Bakshi family. Probably it was the collective curiosity of the older ladies in their families—their own aunts in the Dhar, Kaul and Kak families that prompted their first visit to me in our home. Their Dhar grandparents were among the few families in the locality who cared to socialize with our family which was ostracized by others who were probably put off by the formidable matriarch, my mother-in-law, with her unconventional ways. They and their aunt Neerja were my first friends in the neighbourhood to whom I could turn for help in understanding the alien culture into which I had been transplanted.

Sudha grew up to do extremely well in her studies at school and college in Srinagar and went on to be among the first of Kashmiri Pandit girls to enter the Indian Administrative Service, which she gave up only after her marriage took her to the USA. There she has a successful career in writing and publishing.

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She is the author of the best selling *Tiger Ladies*—featuring the strong women in their Bhat family, her maternal relatives—a book which also paints a vivid picture of life in an extended middle class Pandit family of the post-Independence period. Her sister, Neelima, having married into a Delhi family, was a college teacher there. Urvi Kaul, Prof Jaya Lal Kaul's grand daughter, and Nancy Ambardar of the Ambardar family, also taught at Delhi University Colleges.

Of the neighbours' daughters are Neerja Dhar Mattoo, and Krishna Zadoo Misri, both excellent teachers in their own fields of English and Political Science respectively. They made their mark as Professors and Heads of their respective departments and rose to the Principals' grade, before they chose to retire when faced with challenges of insurgency. Whereas the Misris were forced to leave the Valley for Delhi, the Mattoos have held on to their Gogji Bagh home, spending their summers there even until recently.

Others in our neighbourhood have also been college teachers: Girija Mattoo in Music; Rainu Dhar Kaul of the Lambodar Kaul family in Home Science. There have been other women in the medical field: Shyama Ambardar, the first of the Ambardar grand daughters, who graduated and worked at the Christian Medical College and Hospital at Ludhiana before her marriage, which took her to the USA. Jyoti Kaul, Krishan Lal Kaul's daughter also graduated in medicine, but following her marriage settled in the UK, where she continues to practise medicine. Madhu Dhar Bhat, my sister-in-law's daughter was the first dental surgeon in the family and the neighbourhood, who after migrating out of the Valley post 1989–90, took up an assignment in Saudi Arabia. Our own daughter-in-law, Anita Sikand Bakshi, after

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leaving Jammu and Kashmir in the same period, has made her mark as an outstanding Paediatric Consultant at the Indraprastha Apollo Hospital at Delhi. Dr Girija Dhar, one of the downtown Dhar families, was an early medical graduate and the first of the Kashmiri Pandits to go to the UK for further studies. She has another first to her credit. She married Dr Nasir Ahmed, a Muslim, and went on to become the first female Principal of the Government Medical College in Srinagar.

Special mention must be made about the Zadoo family, our immediate neighbours at Srinagar, who have made a significant contribution to the community and the state. Vasu Dev Zadoo was among the early Kashmiri Pandits who went abroad to the USA for his Civil Engineering degree and training, and returned to work with distinction in the state until his retirement. Though his wife was also one of the older women in the neighbourhood who was not formally educated, she shared her husband's view on educating their daughters when the opportunity came. Their second daughter was married young into the Jyothshi family, who lived at the other end of our lane. However Kamla, their eldest daughter, was the first among Kashmiri Pandit girls to venture for her post-Matriculation studies into what was then the all-male Sri Pratap College. Graduating from there and on her marriage, after moving to Lahore with her husband, she went on to work for a post graduate degree at a Mission-run College, affiliated to the Punjab University, and subsequently work as a teacher. Zadoo Saheb and his wife have to be credited with allowing Kamla to take the bold, brave step to attend the boys' college, which paved the way for her younger sisters to follow in her footsteps. At a time when Kashmiri Pandit women were

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largely confined to their homes, he also permitted his daughters to volunteer to the 'Women's Self-Defence Corps'—the Women's Wing of the National Militia, organized by the National Conference in the wake of the onslaught on Kashmir by the tribesmen from across the newly-created border with Pakistan, following Partition in 1947.

The young girls and women who volunteered to join the Women's Militia were engaged in a wide range of activities on the home front—social, political, humanitarian and cultural. Krishna and Indu had just lost their only brother, Pushkar Nath, who had volunteered to join the Militia to fight the invaders alongside the state forces, by making a last ditch stand against them as they made their way towards Srinagar. He was one among the many who lost their lives to defend Kashmir before the first Indian troops were flown in to beat back the raiders following Maharaja Hari Singh's signing the Instrument of Accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India.

The senior Zadoos are to be admired for their willingness in the face of their tragic loss to allow their young daughters to go out and join other Kashmiri women to undertake weapons training for self-defence and the defence of the city. No doubt this early exposure to social activism formed the basis of concerns of the Zadoo sisters in their later life. Indu joined the Tata School of Social Work in Bombay after her marriage for a distinguished career. Krishna went onto be actively associated with the Women's Wing of the Citizen's Council during the Indo-Pak War of 1965, apart from her teaching career. As a member of the Kashmir Branch of the All India Women's Conference, she was also associated with some of their major projects in the

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Valley—the 'Dastakar Anjuman' and the 'Women's Cooperative' at Miskeen Bagh, which trained women to become self-reliant through acquiring skills that they used in production and cooperative marketing of handicrafts. She rose to the post of Principal, initially of the Women's College at Nawakadal in 1975, and later to take over as Principal at the Women's College at Maulana Azad Road. It was at the height of insurgency in 1990 that she and her husband, Prof Mohan Lal Misri, of the Economics Department of the University of Kashmir, were forced under dire threats to leave Srinagar at short notice.

This was in the period following the 1975 Kashmir Accord signed by Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, with Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, which enabled him to return to the Valley from political exile in Kodaikanal, and to take over as Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. This was the period that saw the rising discrimination against Kashmiri Pandits and attempts to ease them out from the administration. This was also the period that saw the beginnings of the insurgency that became wide spread following 1989. Almost a preview of what was to happen in the Valley in 1989 took place in district Anantnag in the winter of 1986, which was followed by the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from that southern district of Kashmir.

When the fundamentalist onslaught began in the fall of 1989, it started with notices being served on the non-Kashmiri Hindus (mostly Punjabis, who were largely traders and businessmen in Srinagar) to quit the Valley, as they were 'Indian' Hindus. According to fundamentalists, their business interests were detrimental to those of the Kashmiri Muslims. These threats were followed by bomb blasts in their business establishments and killings of prominent individuals. This started the trickle

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of Hindus out of the Valley. This was followed by the specific targeting of Kashmiri Pandits and the brutal killings in cold blood of lawyers, political activists, media persons, government servants, shopkeepers and businessmen.

Unspeakable torture of the worst kind was used to terrorize the community. Women were raped and subjected to the worst horrors. There were families who abandoned their homes and vast agricultural and horticultural properties overnight and made precipitate departures to Jammu, or to the nearest Army camps to seek help to get them out of the Valley. They left carrying what little they could in the bitter cold of January and February of 1990. Not much was done by the authorities to prevent them from suffering the worst because the government machinery had broken down and was incapable of ensuring law and order.

When they reached the relative safety of Jammu, most of them were helpless, with nowhere to go and no one to turn to, until some political parties and sympathetic organizations and later still, the newly appointed governor, Jag Mohan, stepped in to do what could be done. At this point, it was the President of the Jammu Kashmiri Sabha, Dr Kaushalya Wali, who came to their aid and rallied support and organized things to get them settled. I remember her from the time of my transfer in 1961 to the newly established Govt College for Women at Nawakadal, where she was appointed to the post of Lecturer in Sanskrit. A brilliant Sanskrit scholar and teacher, she was modest and self-effacing, and with her simple Gandhian ways, stood out as an odd figure amidst her other colleagues.

I had occasion to meet her in the post-migration period, when she was Head of the Sanskrit Department at the University of Jammu. I had sought her out to learn more about her work to allay

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the plight of the migrants in the camps around Jammu. Never having married, I found her still the same person I had known in Srinagar, unchanged except for her deep and determined concern for the people in the camps and their condition and her efforts to do everything she could for them. Wanting to meet her recently in the same connection, I could not do so and learned that she was in frail physical and mental health and unable to meet people. Her efforts on behalf of the migrants will no doubt go unrecognized and unsung as the years go by.

Another social activist from my earlier years in the Valley, for whom I have the greatest respect and admiration, is the fearless Dr Jagat Mohini Thussu, widow of Dr Omkar Nath Thussu. Over half a century ago, they had not only set up and managed a busy Nursing Home, but she had started a school of nursing, where countless Kashmiri and Punjabi girls had been trained as nurses to man the ever-increasing numbers of hospitals and health centres in the state and outside. She is also known for her social activism in helping women in need. I have my own experience of it in the help she rendered in reinstating my sister-in-law (estranged from her husband for almost a quarter of century) and her daughter, in their rightful home. Despite the worsening situation following the onset of militancy, she has continued her work in Srinagar and prefers to spend the greater part of her year there.

In more recent times, another doctor who espoused the cause of the migrants with her activism on their behalf has been Dr Shakti Bhan. Though I have met her, I do not really know her very well, but only know of what she has done for the community. I need to mention her here, and give her rightful place in the roll of honour of those that have been outspoken and

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vocal on the condition of the migrants. One other such person, who deserves to be mentioned in the same context, is another former colleague of mine, Prof Jaikishori Pandit, who retired as Professor of English, after a long career at the Women's College. She, along with her husband, were among the thousands who were forced to leave their homes in the wake of death threats to them by phones and letters. They continued to stay in Srinagar after the majority had left and were there when the worst of the atrocities were committed by the militants against members of the community.

At that time, while the local, national and international media and human rights activists were protesting vociferously about 'human rights violations' by the security forces against the local Kashmiri Muslim population, there was a conspiracy of silence about what the minority Pandit and Hindu communities had had to endure at the hands of the terrorists. Even moderate Muslims, who might have seemed sympathetic to their plight, were targeted by the radicals in their own community. These incidents, too, were not reported!

At a World Conference organized at Delhi in 1992 by 'Panun Kashmir', Jaikishori, as one of the very few who had stayed on after the events of 19/20 January 1990, was asked to speak of her experiences to the assembled delegates. While most people might have hesitated to do so, she had the courage to stand up and speak out about the atrocities and the terror that had been unleashed on their community, while she and her husband were still in the Valley. It was a time when things were at their worst.

This was a forum at which there were Kashmiri Pandits from all over the world, as well as media persons, and the world at large

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heard about what had actually happened, and what the media had chosen to be silent on. For the first time, media persons (both national and international) were listening to the voices of Kashmiri Pandits. No doubt, there must have been persons from the Intelligence agencies also, vetting the proceedings, who must have taken note of her report. Soon after, she and Dr Shakti Bhan were asked to go to Geneva to present their case on behalf of the Kashmiri Pandit community to the UN Human Rights Commission which had hosted a conference on Kashmir. This was attended not merely by delegates from India, but also from Azad Kashmir and Pakistan. Their reports caused a stir among the delegates assembled there, and the world at large heard about the atrocities committed on the Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley.

It was in 1996, when there was a lull in the violence in the Valley and a measure of stability and calm had been restored through the efforts of these same security forces, that an attempt was made to begin rebuilding the places that had been most damaged by the insurgents. This included schools, government buildings, roads and bridges. In areas that were out of reach of the usual developmental agencies, much work had been done by the security forces.

Here, in this context, I would like to mention particularly the work done by two of my former colleagues, Profs Susheela Bhan and Neerja Mattoo, who have made some truly valuable contributions to both the community and the state after their retirement from their respective careers. It was in 1996 that Professor Susheela Bhan was able to return to Kashmir from Delhi, where for the two previous decades she had been working with the Indian Council of Social Science Research,

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and subsequently, following her retirement had founded the Institute of Peace Research and Action. Her visit to Kashmir and her experience there left her greatly shocked and moved. Her own family had been forced to move out of the Valley in the early 90s. To quote her: "I returned to Delhi with numbness and hopelessness that I had never experienced before. But then I knew I had to do something." Her project 'Cultural Renewal of Kashmiri Youth' grew out of this. Her strategy was to start a programme in the government schools of Kashmir to guide students and teachers to rebuild a society with four core values: Democracy, Secularism, Social Justice, and Human Rights. In the preceding seven years of insurgency, government schools had been perverted from havens of learning to centres for militancy with recruitment from the higher secondary classes of the militant cadres.

Kashmir's unique cultural identity and heritage of the centuries-old blend of the world's greatest religions and cultures—Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam—embodied in the benign Sufi teachings of a common humanity and tolerance had been distorted into the most malign and virulent form imaginable by the fundamentalists to suit their own agenda. The young who were recruited from educational institutions to the secessionist movement had been brainwashed by the newly distorted meanings and values of 'Kashmiriyat', in order to perpetrate the ethnic cleansing of the Valley.

Susheela Bhan's programme under the aegis of her Institute for Peace Research and Action in Delhi is the first cultural and educational scheme to help young Kashmiri Muslims free themselves from the plight in which they were at that time. The

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Tatas financed the initial efforts of this programme. Since 2003, when she was elected to the Ashoka Fellowship for three years, she has had their financial support. Besides this programme, she has over the years been constantly fighting and giving voice to the issues faced by the Pandit community, not merely in various journals, but in various forums. For those interested in knowing more about her work, there is material appended at the end of this volume, as well as additional recommended readings in the bibliography.

One other person and her efforts need to be lauded here. After her retirement, Prof Neerja Mattoo has been engaged in writing and peace-building efforts. Her writings include a wide range of subjects centred on Kashmir, including a current work in progress on Lal Ded. She has presented papers at a number of national and international seminars. Her articles and papers have appeared in several books and academic journals.

She served as Head of the Department of English until 1995 in the grade and status of Principal. In 1984, she was awarded a British Council Visitorship to the Universities of Oxford and London. In 1997–99, she held a Senior Fellowship in Literature of the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

However, her most significant contributions to the community have been as member of two organizations. One of them is 'Athwas', a women's initiative set up by Kashmiri women from different communities to create understanding and cooperation between the women of the state to empower them, including those in the migrant camps in Jammu.

The other initiative is a part of WISCOMP—Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace, a division of the

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Foundation for Universal Responsibility set up by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In 2005–06, it filled me with pride to observe the workings of the project for women under WISCOMP that had been set up and was being conducted by a former student of mine, Nirojini Bhat Bhan at the Purkhu Camp outside Jammu for Kashmiri Pandit migrants. The purpose was to give displaced Kashmiri Pandit women training in developing the useful skill of tailoring to enable them to become self-reliant. The centre was funded entirely by the Dalai Lama's Foundation. This is an extra-curricular activity beyond her duties as UGC Visiting Faculty at the Post Graduate Department of Home Science (Human Development) in the University of Jammu. She was the senior most faculty member at the Institute of Home-Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, and is at present a migrant from the Valley. The University Grants Commission had sought to rehabilitate her at the Jammu University, which however, appears to be unwilling to comply with the UGC'S directions.

Another former student of mine making a significant contribution to the academic life of Jammu is Prof Shashi Kaul, who started out as a lecturer in Home Science years ago at the Government College for Women, Parade Ground, Jammu. She also nursed the Department there through its development until, in 2004 a post graduate department (CRME) was set up there, which she headed and guided well. Sadly, in recent past months, she has been shunted out, and back and forth between heading a college in Banni in the backwoods of southern Jammu province and back to Jammu. What precipitated those moves seem to me the general reluctance on the part of the people of Jammu to allow an outsider, in this case, a Kashmiri to head any department.

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My list of outstanding Pandit women would not be complete without mentioning a cousin of my husband, Khemlata Wakhloo, who was perhaps the first to enter active politics in the state and rise to be minister for Tourism in the government of Farooq Abdullah. She paid the price for it when she and her husband, Dr Omkar Nath Wakhloo, former Principal of many years of the Regional Engineering College at Srinagar, were kidnapped by the militants and had a harrowing experience while in their custody over several weeks. Fortunately for them, it ended well, unlike others who were tortured and put to death.

Today, there are Kashmiri Pandit women in every conceivable sphere of activity. There are those who are content to sit back and enjoy the fact that they survived the move out of the Valley. There are others still who prefer not to get involved even when there is much for them to do, if so inclined. There are, however, also those who though they could afford to be equally detached and unconcerned have instead gone out of their way not only to cater to a felt need of the community outside the Valley, but also in the Valley. They are fortunate enough to be able to maintain their homes and businesses there. One such person is Kiran Dhar, wife of Vijay Dhar and daughter of business magnate Teerath Ram Amla. They have businesses that keep them in Srinagar. She has been an entrepreneur in her own right in the old days, but today she has brought a school's franchise to Srinagar in order to cater to the need of children whose parents want the best education for their children that the existing schools have not been able to give them. In early days of militancy, in the face of the threats to local schools, the more affluent Muslim families sought to send their children outside the Valley to safer places

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for their education. Today, Kiran Dhar's efforts have brought quality education to the doorstep for those who may not be able to afford to send their children outside for it.

These persons represent just a very small section of outstanding women of the post-Independence period. This is also an incomplete study as it has been limited to Kashmiri Pandit women I have known in my life in the Valley prior to 1990. In the two decades since then, there are countless women dispersed all over the country and the far corners of the world. Among them there are undoubtedly any number who have made their special mark wherever they are in their respective fields.

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SEVEN

Challenges Now and Tomorrow

"The last two decades have been troubled and bewildering ones and, not surprisingly, many people turned to history to understand what is going on."

"Economic troubles bring, as they brought in the past, domestic pressures for protection and trade barriers. Ideologies—then fascism and Communism, now religious fundamentalisms—challenge the assumption of liberal internationalism and wage war on powers they see standing in their way. And we still have, as the world had in the first half of the twentieth century, the unreasoning force of ethnic nationalism."

Margaret MacMillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), pp 11, 12

"For some religions, history provides evidence of working out a divine purpose."

"History, and perhaps that is the case today, can also be an escape from the present. When the world is complicated and changing rapidly, not necessarily for the better, it is no surprise that we look back to what we mistakenly think was a simpler and clearer world."

Margaret MacMillan, *ibid* (2008), p 15

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7.1 Post-Diaspora: Heartbreak, Despair and Challenges

In 2004, fifteen years after they fled the Valley in late 1989 or early 1990, there were 6,333 families still living in wretched conditions in the camps in and around Jammu at Udhampur, Nagrota. These were families of land owning agriculturists and horticulturists from the rural areas of the Valley. At that time, there were also 30,415 families living in the Jammu region outside the camps. Some 2,000 more fortunate families had migrated to other parts of the country—primarily to areas around the capital. All of these were families who had lost all they owned and their way of life as they abandoned everything virtually overnight to save the honour of their womenfolk and their own lives. That precipitate fleeing left this section of the community more traumatized than any of the others, particularly the women and children.

Today as we look at the position of all these women, particularly those of the Pandit community, we cannot view them as a displaced women's group as a whole. Each community has its own problems; the displaced Kashmiri women too cannot be viewed as one group and their problems dealt with as such. They fall into two distinct categories and their problems vis-à-vis their status and their resolutions need to be viewed and addressed differently.

Compared to the condition of women from earlier eras and their experiences of migrating out of the Valley to seek refuge elsewhere, the present lot of migrants is definitely different. The sections of the women who have been hardest hit are those who are stranded still, and languishing in the various migrant camps in the Jammu region and also in and around Delhi. These are

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the rural families who had to abandon their homesteads, land holdings and cattle, their orchards, and their agrarian way of life practically overnight. It is now over seventeen years since they moved out of the Valley and they are yet to be rehabilitated.

While the government has made half-hearted and token attempts to provide them with a little more space by way of two-room tenements, they still subsist on the government's inadequate relief doles. These are people who were well-off in their earlier life and have now been reduced to poverty and despair. They merely exist, they live on without hope. Over this time many have succumbed to the extreme conditions to which they were subjected in the early years of their migration, in the tented accommodation, inclement climate, and crowded conditions in the camps. Their children and the younger generations were denied the means to continue their education and trained for occupations other than what they had known.

The more fortunate among the migrants have been the urban-based families, who were either in service when they were displaced or had the training to work in areas of their choice. Being thrown into the Indian mainstream offered them myriad opportunities and made it easier for them to make their adjustments and be absorbed into it on the basis of their merit. Opportunities were offered to them by states like Maharashtra that created a quota for such students in institutions of higher education from where they have since graduated and found jobs. They were not discriminated against, as they were in earlier times in the Valley by the majority community. Brilliant students and the professionals amongst them have found a ready welcome at the best universities and organizations in the country as well as

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abroad. As political refugees they were readily granted asylum by several nations of the world and wherever they are today, they have made their mark in the sphere of work or study that they have chosen to undertake.

Men and women alike of this section of the diaspora have generally been very well rehabilitated and are living lives of unprecedented affluence and well being. The lotus eaters of earlier times have acquired the work ethic of the West along with western values that are probably less desirable. The earlier value system is fast changing, especially with the younger generation. The extended family of yore, which had provided a support system, is being fast replaced by the nuclear family and a more insular, less caring way of life.

These women no doubt are more self reliant and better empowered than their mothers and grandmothers but has the pendulum swung too far in the other direction? Their preoccupation with the material things of life has tended to blind them to the values of the previous generations which were an essential part of their unique culture. Careers and creation of wealth and its attendant adjuncts seem to have taken precedence over what they probably consider 'old world' values of family, kinship, and a nurturing and caring world view.

The problem of the women displaced from rural areas is a much different one. These women come from families that have known only one way of life that revolved around the tasks and responsibilities needed to deal with their agrarian environment. They were born to that life, and had learnt to live and address the challenges thrown up by that way of life. They lived in extended families comprising several generations and within a

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mutually supportive familial and social structure. They had lived in that better time in larger spaces with adequate resources to live comfortably, if not affluent lifestyles. Except for the severe winters that the Kashmir Valley suffered, the greater portion of the year presented salubrious conditions.

From this situation the events of 1989–90 suddenly pitched them into their own private version of hell on earth. The fortunate ones among them were able to find shelter with relatives outside the Valley, but the majority were at the mercy of the ad hoc arrangements made for them by government or relief agencies. They lived initially (and some even to this day) in the refugee camps provided for them, which had tented accommodations on the rocky banks of the river Tawi in the Jammu region. Whole families lived in a single tent. It was as if nature itself had conspired against them. They fell victim to the fierce summer heat of the region and the assaults of scorpions and snakes to which several succumbed. The limited spaces allotted to them denied them the privacy they needed, resulting in frayed nerves and tensions.

With nothing outside the daily grind to survive in the camps to engage them, both men and women who earlier had their routine cut out by the demands of agriculture, horticulture, or animal husbandry through the seasons of the year, lapsed into deep apathy and frustration. The plight of widows and orphans was particularly depressing. In the absence of familial and economic support; they were at the mercy of relatives, who themselves were in desperate situations.

With the imposition of Governor's rule, the implementation of relief programmes was in the hands of the bureaucrats. In

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those early years, there was widespread indifference or outright hostility towards the community, and a denial of what should have been their due rights in matters concerning transfer of pension accounts, settling of pension cases, dispersal of relief funds, and migrant dues.

Youngsters whose schooling and education were disrupted by their exodus from the Valley faced immense problems in enrolling in local schools. Though the school system in the entire state was under one ministry, this should have sought to adjust them in a better manner than the pathetically run 'Camp Schools' and 'Camp Colleges'. Where earlier a large section of the educators, both at school and college levels, in the Valley had comprised of Kashmiri Pandits, regional bias against them prevented migrant educators and students alike from being properly accommodated in the existing educational institutions in the Jammu region.

Health suffered as a result of unhygienic conditions in the camps—indifferent nutrition, poor or non-existent facilities for safe water supply, sanitation and health care facilities. NGOs and relief agencies organized by some political parties used the situation to further their own political agendas. The parties directly to be blamed for their part in the secessionist movement in the Valley were conveniently out of the picture and were not interested in the plight of the victims of the movement. Seventeen odd years have seen a plethora of governments come and go both at the Centre and in the state, but only a few have listened to the voice of the Kashmiri Pandit community. In fact they do not speak with one voice. Different sections headed by persons with their own self-serving interests are puppets in the hands of vested interests within the state, at the Centre and

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at international level. They use the situation to keep things 'on the boil' rather than attempt to restore some measure of normalcy to the state. This is something that now perhaps every Kashmiri, irrespective of religious or political orientation or otherwise, deeply craves. The people who suffer and despair are the displaced rural Kashmiri Pandits who still await a measure of justice if not proper rehabilitation. They have sunk so low into apathy that they seem incapable of pulling themselves out of their situation to face up to the challenges and look constantly towards indifferent governmental agencies.

Here we have two groups of the same community in diametrically-opposite positions. One is definitely better off for having been thrown out of the Valley and looks westwards for its aspirations and ambitions. The other is marooned in the morass of its own apathy and frustration and looks to others to pull them out of it. One common factor, however, with both groups is the erosion of their value systems and identity. With the increasing Western orientation to life and values, much of the original value system has been lost. The family structure itself has disintegrated with the breakdown of the extended family into the nuclear units that increasingly are insular. With the collapse of the family structure has come the collapse of the earlier value system which ensured mutual help in times of crisis and need, not merely from the family but by the neighbourhood and community that rallied to the need.

The religious education and spiritual and moral elevation enjoined in the earlier system is neglected to the effect that today's youngsters grow up innocent of the Sanskrit and Kashmiri languages, and the Vedic lore that is their heritage. Even

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the knowledge and practice of the daily Vedic rites and rituals and the special ones attending the rites of passage through life are no longer within the purview of recent generations. The role of the women in all these aspects of her family life has often been diminished and abased to mere drudgery and the chores involved in preparing and providing the wherewithal for performance of such rites undertaken by the patriarch or priest.

One has to only look at the average Kashmiri Pandit family to see how impoverished a lot they are in relation to the qualities that in ancient times marked them as true Brahmins. One has to compare the Kashmiri Brahmin male of today with his counterparts elsewhere in India to see where he stands. Much of this can be attributed to the abasement and neglect of the women in the community and the denial of her right place in the family and community. All these curbs had an impact on the women's role as mother and care-giver of the young.

Today, the nursery school, kindergarten and the day-care have intruded on the mother's role as the primary care-giver, nurturer and teacher of the child, and he is deprived of her influence. Subsequently, the school system took over the role of the guru. The driving need today in an intensely competitive world is for a 'modern' education for both genders, with its emphasis on success and competing for the material fruits of such success has replaced the old value system. The respect for elders and teachers, the spirit of service or self-discipline of the earlier *guru-shishya parampara* have all vanished.

Here it needs to be pointed out that for all the injustices she herself suffered, the Kashmiri Pandit woman has not merely been a victim of a male-dominated society, but she in turn in different

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roles within the family situation has victimized other women. The mother who gives preferential treatment to her sons neglecting the needs of her daughter is an offender. The 'emancipated', educated daughter of today who has unrealistic expectations of her parents is again victimizing them. The mother-in-law and sister-in-law in orthodox traditional families, and sadly, even in today's more 'liberal' society, who victimize the daughter-in-law are perhaps the worst offenders in this respect. Kashmiri history and present-day society are replete with such examples. Conversely, too, today, Indira Gandhi's legislation to 'protect' daughters-in-law from their in-laws is being used against husbands and their in-laws who have become present day victims. These are the less desirable aspects of the culture that need radical changes.

Despite their dwindling numbers, the tyranny of the priests has not diminished. With many of them giving up their traditional role in the community, this fact apparently makes them indispensable and has resulted in their exploiting the community with the blatant commercialization of their services. This is a trend that needs to be curbed soon.

Traditionally, in earlier times when there was limited means of contact and communication between far-flung members of the family, festivals and rites of passage of members afforded the prospect of the coming together of members for festivities, celebrations or sharing of grief. These occasions also provided for the livelihood of the family priest who presided over the rituals associated with such events. These occasions also gave the women folk a welcome break from the monotony of their lives. But in today's fast-paced world, with family scattered world-wide rather than in the Valley or its immediate vicinity, there is a need for a

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more realistic, pragmatic approach to organizing such occasions. However, the vested interest of the priests and oddly, often the women of the family, militate against any reform of these.

It is to the credit of social reformers amongst the early migrants out of the Valley, that they saw the need to make changes and set about implementing them by imposing some limits and standards in these respects. It was the straitened circumstances of these expatriate communities that dictated the need for these changes. Today, however, in certain affluent sections of the community with a more materialistic mind-set and values, once again, needless ostentation and luxuries, and meaningless customs have either persisted or crept into their ways of life from other cultures. The limitations of other less-endowed sections of the community are ignored. Here too, unfortunately, it would seem that it is the women who are responsible for these aberrations and there is a need to change.

In his November 2004 Editorial in *Naad* on "An Agenda for Social Reforms", Vijay Saqi (Mahanoori) says:

> *"Excessive expenditure on marriages, meaningless rituals, inter-caste marriages, high rate of divorce, ignorance of mother tongue and dwindling availability of 'Gurujis'. Sadly, this is the canvas of our community."*

He goes on to examine the truth behind this situation and explains it away as the result of "our living away from our motherland, living in a complex situation where we need to have 'balanced approaches'". Does this 'balanced approach' justify the excessive expenditure on marriages that following the diaspora some newly affluent families flaunt? Rather, it is a slap in the face of those countless families that 18 years after leaving their

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homeland, are still struggling to find their feet in their new environment, and cannot afford to even achieve a small measure of their earlier life styles. Though they may not then have been affluent, they were at least afforded a comfortable contentment; to say nothing of the lot of thousands of families still living in the miserable conditions of the camps in and around Jammu.

On the subject of meaningless rituals, especially in view of the dwindling numbers of the Kashmir gurujis of earlier times to perform them this is a phenomenon which does not today merely afflict the Kashmiri Pandit community, but Brahmin communities everywhere in India. In the aftermath of the Mandal Commission recommendations in the north, and even earlier with the rise in the south of the Dravidian movement, with its backlash hitting the until then dominant Brahmin community; with the reservations in every field for the backward communities, younger Brahmins have left the country in large numbers to seek their fortunes elsewhere. The priestly class no longer finds it lucrative to perform its traditional role and their children no longer aspire to step into their elders roles, but would rather put their talents into other avenues which will give them a better standing as well as a better life. It was Swami Chinmayananda of the Chinmaya Mission (even as early as the 70s and 80s), who advocated the need for ordinary people who needed rituals in their lives to learn to perform them themselves. At his camps, and in the Bal and Yuva groups, youngsters learned to recite *shlokas*, and older people participated in mass rituals that were organized in his camps without the benefit of a *purohit*.

Instead of bemoaning their plight in this respect, the members of the community should see their way to establishing similar

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institutions. Many of such youngsters, especially in the camps, who are still struggling to find a vocation in life, could enroll in *gurukuls* where they could get a thorough training and grounding in the *shastras* and performance of rituals. That was one of the principal roles of the Saraswat Brahmin before he branched out into service under rulers and in the bureaucracy. In all these years spent outside the Valley, the community has felt the lack of gurujis, but nothing was done to remedy this along the lines on which other Brahmin communities are doing it, as suggested by Saqi. If they can consider preparation of audio and videotapes by way of refresher courses for local priests, why do they not use them as courses for their own people who might better benefit from them? The Chinmanya Mission in the 90s had an audio cassette and booklet that sold for a minimal amount on *Pooja Viddhi* with an introduction by Swamiji himself. Why cannot those who are competent to do a similar exercise, and whom the community holds in due regard and respect do this? In recent years, the authors and publishers of the Kashmiri almanac have attempted to do this but why have there been no yearly camps or workshops organized during school/college/university holidays where younger persons in the community interested in learning the ropes could be instructed by a few dedicated Kashmiri *purohits?*

Vijay Saqi deplores the inter-caste marriages and the high rates of divorce in the community. Has it struck the community that there are very valid reasons for both these phenomena? Young people in the urban community—of both sexes—are being educated and empowered to prepare them for careers. They are going into fields of work that were not known to their

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parents before they left the Valley. They are better educated and better compensated for their work than earlier generations were. Often they are working or travelling in connection with their careers and are thrown together with people of all communities, castes and creeds in this process, especially in the metropolises and cities. These places give them the opportunities to study and work, and that is why they continue to be there.

Money is a major driving force for the post-diaspora younger generation aspiring to a good life, and the greater their incomes, the greater the freedom to make their own decisions especially where it concerns their lives, that is, in the choice of a job, a partner in life, where they will live and work. Parents quite often do not have a say in the matter. Thrown as they are into the cosmopolitan and pluralistic milieu, they may choose to marry outside the confines of their own caste, creed or community. Often within those confines, their own parents may not be able to find a suitable match even if they want to, leaving it to their children to marry any one who may be suitable in every other respect except that of caste or community. That accounts for the inter-caste marriages that Saqi deplores.

As for the increasing number of divorces among the younger generation, one can find several reasons. Today, the two-income family is the norm if the young couple hopes to live the life they aspire for. Also, many young couples, either through need or preference, are nuclear families as opposed to being part of the great big extended family of earlier times in the Valley. They no longer have the strong familial support that the extended joint family situation provided. This is especially true after children are born. In this new situation, both distance and lack of desire

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for it fail to provide the help and support to the new parents who have to depend on day-care or other facilities to cope with the care of young children while they are both at work. Needless to say, this can create a great deal of stress and strain between the partners. While at this stage in family life, it might be in everyone's interests for the young mother to take a protracted break from her career to attend to the needs of her growing family, often circumstances (financial or otherwise) induce her to decide to go back to work once the child is weaned or after her maternity leave is over. Again this can be a source of tension, especially where there might be grandparents in the background, who would willingly take care of the infants and young children. Where such offers may or may not be availed of, again, there is much heart burning all around.

Often in a marriage, where there is a mismatch of incomes, with the wife earning more than the husband it can be a blow to his male ego. This was, after all, a patriarchal society originally, and those original ingrained attitudes and mindsets are still a hangover, and can play havoc in a marriage. In today's fast-paced goal-oriented competitive world, there are enough stresses and strains in one's working life that often precipitate the marriage into divorce. The generation gap, in still intact joint families, and a lack of understanding between the generations can lead to conflict, and again push the young people to separation and divorce. Values have changed since the diaspora. Today the younger generation often lacks the respect and consideration due to the older generation, leading to increasing differences with them. Counselling by others is often construed as unnecessary and uncalled-for interference, leading to relationships and

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marriages spinning out of control and ending in divorce courts. Perhaps the most devastating of causes for divorce are those where expectations of dowry and other benefits to the husband's family take on unrealistic dimensions. There have been instances of even very carefully arranged marriages in so called 'emancipated' families having gone down this road to divorce. Mutual understanding and consideration and attempts to work out differences do not appear to be the order of the day, nor does divorce carry the stigma that was earlier associated with it.

Perhaps the only point on which Saqi's litany of complaints can be attributable directly to "living away from the homeland" is the ignorance of the mother tongue in youngsters growing up and living outside the Valley. Since the 90s, wherever they were thrown by those circumstances, they needed to adapt to the situation and its needs. Living in Jammu camps required that they learn to speak the language in use there, that is, Dogri. Kashmiri had little relevance in that situation. Children picked up new languages faster than older people wherever they settled anew—in the Punjab or in and around Delhi. What served the community best was a working knowledge of the local language whether Punjabi or Hindi and of course, a mastery of English helped them in the world of education, and work. Kashmiri, with its unique script, is a language that has little in common with other Indian languages except in its evolution from Sanskrit. One needs to be constantly exposed to it to learn it. Except in the Kashmiri family's home situation and in the Valley, which is no longer their homeland for Kashmiri Pandits, it is not used anywhere else.

On discarding or curtailing meaningless rituals including the pointless expenditure on *Maaskar* and *Pophkar* customs, in the

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rites of passage, and marriage celebrations, as well as the endless ceremonies extending over a fortnight following a death in the family, few would disagree with Saqi. All these need to be debated by the community elders and reformed to conform to the needs and compulsions of the vastly changed new situation in which the Pandits find themselves today. The community however, needs to keep in mind that in this process of cultural reform they should not lose their unique Kashmiri identity. Women have to play an active role in the whole process of social reform because they are the transmitters of their culture to future generations. They are also the ones who can reap the benefits of such cultural changes.

It stands to reason that those best qualified to bring about the needed changes are both the women and the men in the community. They are the ones who must determine what is in the best interest of their people at this time and in the vastly changed situation in which they find themselves today. They need to learn to recognize their own limitations and do the needful to overcome them, rather than looking to outside agencies, be it government, NGOs, or social activists. In earlier times, other migrants rose to the task, so can the present generation too. They need to strike a balance between fitting in the world of today, yet not losing their unique identity. The choice is theirs, the effort must be theirs, and the rewards will be theirs too. The women must lead the way.

7.2 The Way Ahead

If the Kashmiri Pandits are to consider the challenges they will face tomorrow, they need to examine and deal with the challenges they face today. They must think of the needs of the community

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as a whole rather than as a fractured society that it finds itself to be. No one can deny this fact and herein lies the greatest of problems that this community faces. This is the fatal flaw in its collective psyche. If one looks back through its history, there are a number of instances where instead of looking to the larger interests of their people, leaders with the potential to serve that interest, have instead been self-serving. Today also they seem to be unable to shed that blinkered approach to any problem. They just refuse to look at the big picture.

There are various sections of the diaspora and each group has its own singular problems and aspirations. There is an ageing group retired from service, in most cases, who remember the good life prior to the exodus and who are filled with nostalgia and a longing to return to the Valley. There is also the middle-aged group who would still be working there had they not left the Valley. Today they are dispossessed of their jobs and prospects, perhaps reasonably comfortable in terms of finances, thanks to the dole they receive from the government, by way of compensation in lieu of lost income. Not all of them have been able to find a way to keep themselves satisfactorily occupied. The frustration levels of such people finds release in ways that is not always in the best interest of those around them—the family, and community. There is much that this group could do to help alleviate the misery and despair of those who do not have as much as them. This is the most vulnerable of the groups living in the migrant camps around Jammu and the settlements around Delhi. Why have they not got together and put their minds and efforts to bettering the lot of the have-nots of the community? There are some concerned people who are already making this effort either

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on an individual basis or collectively but these are few and far between. There is also a whole new generation born just before the exodus, living outside the Valley who do not know the first thing about their homeland and who have not known the life there before the migration. They are unaware of the composite culture that existed there and nurtured tolerance and harmony between the majority and minority communities. Finally there are those who have lost little, in comparison to what, leaving the Valley, has helped them gain. In fact they have attained levels of quality of life which were undreamt of. Do they not need to give to those who lag far behind them?

The Kashmiri Pandit community does not merely consist of those who left the Valley in 1989–90. There are those who chose to stay behind and are still there seventeen odd years down the line. They have their own set of problems. Then there are also those of the community who have not lived in the Valley at all in recent decades and have never had, in the present time, to face the trauma that the migrants did. What can they do for their fellow men?

It would seem that the obvious answer is, first and foremost, for all these groups to come together, putting aside petty considerations and differences. They need to put their heads together to discover what it is that is responsible for their present plight. It is not enough to look outwards and put the blame on merely external circumstances or events, political movements or government policies. They must ponder on whether they themselves posed some kind of threat to the interests of the majority community that resulted in changing the age-old tolerance and goodwill of that community towards them, to either indifference or downright hostility.

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Among the other questions, they will have to ask themselves is what their priorities are today. Is it merely a question of preserving their unique identity and culture? Where do they go from here? Do they all really want a return to the Valley or would they prefer to seek to go where they have the freedom to live as they want to, without the fear of oppression and persecution?

Who will determine these goals? Will it, as always in the past, be the autocratic decisions of the men folk alone, who earlier dominated this patriarchal society? Will the women finally be empowered enough to share in the decision making and problem resolving processes that face the community as a whole? The Kashmiri Panditani has a significant role to play.

The Kashmiri woman of today as a preserver and transmitter of her culture needs to take a good, hard look at the role she has to play. She stands at the cross-roads. Should she try to preserve that culture with all its flaws and its merits or should she thank providence for having brought her out of the close confines of the Valley culture into the broader perspective of world culture? Should she decide blindly to hang on to the old, irrelevant aspects or should she glean the best of it and try her best to nourish and nurture it where it falters, discarding what is detrimental to the interests of the community at large? In this process, one sees the younger generation abandoning the best that the past offers, and clinging to the worst aspects, while blindly reaching out to western values and ways. The community has much to learn from other people of the world who have had similar experiences through history.

Closer to home, one has been witness to the way the Tibetan community, which fled before the Chinese persecution in 1959, has rallied under the dynamic and selfless leadership of the

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Dalai Lama. They have faced up to the challenge thrown up by their displacement and nearly half a century later are a distinct ethnic and cultural group that has retained its identity and way of life. This is despite the fact that they have no homeland but are widely scattered over the world. Their dogged determination to be heard has probably shaken even the Chinese overlords who now rule over their original homeland and have attempted to change its demographics with widespread settlement of the 'Han' people there. Whereas earlier there was ruthless violence used to browbeat the indigenous population, today the Chinese policies in Tibet are more tolerant towards them. The Potala in Lhasa has been restored, as also other ancient sites, if only as a concession to encouraging tourism which is a lucrative business. Lamas, who earlier had been brutally tortured and killed, are found guarding the precious artefacts in the Potala. However, the most recent demonstrations worldwide on the occasion of the Olympic torch rally have highlighted the frustrations of the younger generation of Tibetans, who would rather abandon the non-violent and pacifist approach of the Dalai Lama to seek greater autonomy for Tibet. They would rather prefer to resort to a more aggressive approach to bringing the attention of the world community to their own demands for their future.

If one has to draw a comparison with another ancient people and their culture who have been subjected to savage persecutions and world-wide diaspora through the millennia, one has to only look to the Jewish nation. It is said that one is a Jew only if one is born to a Jewish mother, highlighting the role of the mother in the preservation of the culture. Despite their two thousand odd years of wanderings over the face of the earth, they are a

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people who have kept their Jewish identity, cherishing it fiercely through the incredibly long periods of their suffering. Through good times and affluence, they have not lost their essential Jewish identity. They have preserved their language, revived it despite its corruption, until today you have a Jewish nation that speaks Hebrew. They have kept their ancient rites and rituals in their most pristine forms—the Rabbi in the synagogue, and the woman in the home doing their bit to make that possible, and they have achieved this through coming together and staying together.

Perhaps the Kashmiri Pandit community too can emulate this fiercely proud, independent nation, which despite their coming together from the far corners of the world are united as one in their efforts to survive as a nation. They know who they are, where they come from and where they want to go. Their women have helped them do that as it is hoped that this community's women will help them do the same. Unfortunately for the Kashmiri Pandits, uniting for common cause is not their forte. Where the men in the community have failed in this, perhaps the women can take responsibility for it and work towards preserving the community and its culture in its best form to meet the needs of the times ahead. Only when this community can finally abandon the divisive tendencies it suffers from today, put aside its petty self-serving ways, and speak with one voice, and not merely speak but act as one, will there be hope of its becoming a force to reckon with in today's world.

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Appendix

Towards a Culture of Peace: Cultural Renewal of Kashmiri Student Youth—An Experiment in Peace Education*

Context

Jammu and Kashmir, the north-western state of India is located between 32.17' and 37.5' north latitude and 72.40' and 37.5 east longitude. The geographical area of the undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir is 222,236 sq kms which includes 120,849 occupied by Pakistan and China. The area on the Indian side of the Line of Control, thus, is 1,01,387 sq kms. This area comprises three regions namely, the Kashmir Valley, the Jammu region and Ladakh and remains divided into 14 administrative districts with an estimated population of 10,069,917 (Census 2001).

Kashmir Valley, where the experiment has been launched, constitutes six administrative districts with a population of 5,441,341 (Census 2001). The breakup of this population among these six districts is as follows: (1) Srinagar: 1,238,530

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* This report is authored by Prof Susheela Bhan, Director, Institute of Peace Research and Action, New Delhi

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(2) Baramulla: 1,166,722 (3) Anantnag: 11,70,013 (4) Pulwama: 632,295 (5) Budgam: 593,768 (6) Kupwara: 640,013.

With a history of 5,000 years, the Kashmiri identity, aided by its territorial homogeneity, stands distinct from the other regions of the state even as it has much in common with the composite cultural heritage of the subcontinent in general. The cultural constant of 'Kashmiriyat' has been used to conceptualize the syncretic cultural heritage of the Kashmiri people rooted in a synthesis of Vedantic, Buddhist strands of thought and the Sufi and Rishi movement of religious humanism which developed with the advent of Islam around the middle of the 14th Century. Influencing each other deeply through their long history the two religious (Hindu and Muslim) communities came to share a common social, cultural, psychological and intellectual orientation. The message of tolerance, love, brotherhood, respect for diverse ways of thinking living including respect for all religions and above all the message of social justice emanating from the Sufis, came to permeate the consciousness of all the communities inhabiting the Valley.

Unfortunately, the Valley became a bone of contention between India and Pakistan the very moment the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947, subjecting vulnerable people to unforeseen pressures and interests, to regular wars and proxy wars of terrorism, to exploitative political arrangements and the rest, lending welcome strength to fundamentalist and divisive forces. The present experiment is a modest attempt to provide an educational response to aid the efforts of Kashmiris to free themselves from the historical predicament that has engulfed them.

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Focus on Youth

Youth marginality, atomization and alienation have their roots in values and ideologies which make for particular social formations or withdrawal from them. The identity crisis of the Indian youth has remained attendant on the country's developmental transition. With dramatic changes in the socio-economic and political relationships, the transition reflects a steep decline of traditional values and the erosion of primary bases of security and support compounded by the impact of modern technology and communication revolution. The resultant cultural upheaval and chaos has, over the years, rendered the Indian youth increasingly insecure.

Kashmiri youth have been the victims of a much more complex and lethal political and cultural ecology fostered by the political uncertainties and instability of the decades on the one hand and the negative forces released on that account, on the other. As such the advent of the emergent individuality of Kashmir after independence supposed to be shaped by a democratic vision of equality, social justice and secularism (the accepted wisdom of the cultural character of Kashmiriyat) was throttled by a systematic and criminal erosion of the fundamental cultural heritage of the people. Worse a new concept of Kashmiriyat got promoted, a form of ethnicity which became situational, subservient to specific times and interests, a time server, shifting, fleeting and illusory. The constituents of traditional Kashmiri identity and personality, the myths, memories, symbols and values were accorded new meanings and functions and the young were fed on these. Little wonder that within a milieu of normlessness corruption, criminalization, exploitation, unemployment and

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other forms of indignities and hardships, the identity crisis of the younger generation deepened to a point where they lost faith in the system, felt compelled to withdraw from the established structures, processes and many took recourse to violence. Even today they continue to grapple with their alienation and impact of the traumatic experience of the decade.

In thinking of securing a future for Kashmir, the enormous resources of the young would have to be rehabilitated. This calls for a cultural revolution, a revolution that must begin in the educational institutions where daily interaction of the individual students reflects complexities and contradictions of their lives. It is here that the reorientation of their psyche through breaking the hold of the debilitating distortions of their consciousness, their alienation from the state as well as masses of people, becomes central.

Educational Programme

It was in this context that IPRA took a decision to embark upon an educational programme on the Cultural Renewal of the Student Youth (CROKSY) in the Kashmir Valley in close collaboration with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The hypothesis we set out with was that an educational response aimed at the transformation of its youth power in the service of peace, would prove crucial to the resolution of the predicament the Kashmiri society was faced with. Obviously the first step towards this transformation would be breaking the alienation of Kashmiri youth and gaining their trust in the direction of rebuilding the structures of Kashmiri society. A mightier law and order machinery or an enhanced benevolence on the part

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of the elites would certainly, not bring this about. The real empowerment of the youth itself informed by the civilizational thrust of their rich humanistic heritage, the traditional Kashmiriyat, in our view, was the only answer.

The strength of this process of transformation would not only be creative intellect of the youth. The potential of youth also lies in its idealism, energy and willingness to depart from things obsolete, decadent and unethical. Young people, generally, have the capacity to develop a collective consciousness which deepens in situations of intense interaction for prolonged periods. The personal values of the young are not fully crystallized and they are ready to make rational choices and shoulder responsibility, indoctrination of whatever kind and level notwithstanding. Given an opportunity and space to understand the processes behind the recognizable picture, the young look at a new set of goals. Goal achievement is the hall mark of this age and if Kashmiris are to educate themselves for peace as adults, it would be that much easier if the necessary skills, values and attitudes are developed among the young. Fewer negative values/attitudes will need correction at this state and positive attitudes will come easily.

It has to be noted however, that while the cultural paradigm would remain crucial to this transformation, the issue of cultural change could not be lost sight of. Culture changes subtly and more so in response to unprecedented changes and complex arrangements in material life, in the distribution of power, in the categorization of persons, and in the understanding of human experience that come to have their own effects which can be explained through economic, political, social and intellectual history. It is within this framework that the present project made

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an attempt to develop a cultural paradigm which could provide a scientific basis for an understanding of the predicament of the Kashmiris in order to find lasting solutions to their problems.

The project was launched in March 1999 in 30 high and higher secondary schools of Srinagar district. On public demand the project was extended to 30 schools of Baramulla district in the year 2000. Subsequently, it was extended to 30 schools each of Badgam Anantnag, Pulwama and Kupwara districts. As such the project in now running in 180 schools of all the six districts in the Kashmir Valley.

Direct and Indirect Beneficiaries

The decision to work at the secondary school level was a considered one because these schools have been recruitment grounds for the terrorist organizations. While the project impacts the entire student community in the project schools, currently around twelve thousand students in six districts participate in the project activities on a regular basis. These students are drawn from 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th classes.

The other students who are not directly participating in the project get motivated to follow the footsteps of the students (direct beneficiaries) in joining the programme. More importantly in terms of attitudinal changes, skills training and acquisition of knowledge, the educational programme promotes a spill over effect through the peer group and inter and intra-family interaction.

The close involvement of the teachers in the project is not only to the extent of their running the project but also in developing a commitment to peace and prosperity in the state.

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They themselves gain knowledge on the rich humanist heritage of the Valley, inculcate and promote the relevant values and attitudes and skills, get trained in using culture as an instrument of education and learn to link the traditional value system with modern values, viz., democracy, secularism, human rights and social justice. The teachers are not only looked upon with a great deal of respect but are also messengers of the local areas. They carry the work and ideas forward not only at schools but to the community at large.

The project has a complement of full-time staff of about 18 persons who include the chief coordinator, six programme officers (one for each district), newsletter editor, evaluation officer, material development officer and a training officer in addition to an administrative officer, accountant, computer operator, a peon, a *chowkidar*, a driver and a gardener. The project office is housed in a rented building at Srinagar.

Objectives

The general objective set for the project is to work closely with the student youth, develop effective communication with them and operationalize an educational programme aimed at imparting the necessary knowledge, values and skills towards a cultural regeneration and renewal.

The specific objectives of the educational programme were delineated as follows:-

(a) To promote a deep reflection on the contingent specific history and literature of Kashmiris, their understanding of themselves, their traditions and values, their organic

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solidarities as also their fundamental belief in a common human nature.

(b) To help them to evaluate their present situation, raise questions, generate new descriptions and meanings to emancipate themselves from the psyche of alienation, of distorted drives and visions and recover themselves as a moral force, rooted in the spiritual, humanitarian and cultural values of traditional Kashmiriyat informed by modern values of democracy, human rights, social justice and secularism.

(c) To build the necessary linkages and competencies to enable them to participate in the reconstruction of the structures of the Kashmiri society.

Implementation Strategy

The broad strategy developed for implementation and detailed below is not treated as inviolable. Whenever changes become necessary, they are introduced in response to the requirements of the project. The methodology, in fact, is still evolving as a continuous learning process.

Collaboration with the J&K Government

While planning the project, the Institute had taken a decision to launch the programme with the approval and in close collaboration of the J&K Govt. This necessitated extensive pre-launch discussions with the officers of the Educational Department at all levels, individually and jointly. The interaction

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proved to be highly educative and effective. There emerged a consensus among the officers on the feasibility and workability of the project. A view put forth was that the project, if implemented with the necessary sensitivity and care, would come like a fresh breeze to the traumatized and vulnerable student community at the high and higher secondary stage. At the same time, the members made numerous suggestions in terms of a cautious approach the project team would have to pursue in motivating and orienting the students, teachers and the parents. The officers offered their full support to the project director for an effective implementation of the project. The exercise, they promised, would be a joint endeavour and they would start the necessary spadework right away.

Armed with the tremendous response of his officers, the Education Commissioner took the next logical step in giving, an explicit exposition of the proposed programme to the then Minister for School Education who called for further discussion on the subject. Formal orders of approval and active collaboration were issued after the conclusive meeting with the Minister wherein having raised very concise queries particularly on the operational framework of the proposed project, he agreed that the suggested educational exercise was the dire need of the hour and if implemented vigorously, would prove crucial to the rehabilitation of the alienated youth at a difficult and complex stage of their personality development.

Consequently, in operationalizing the programme, the project team has developed comprehensive interaction with the Department of Education from the top level of ministers, the officers of the Directorate of Education as also officers working

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at the district levels, to the concerned teachers and students, to ensure their unstinted support, cooperation and participation. Multi-level meetings, with the departmental officers of education have thus been a regular feature from the very beginning. The agenda of these meetings ranges from introducing the project to the concerned officers (particularly those who are fresh entrants or join on transfer); identification of schools for the launch of the project; deputation of teachers associated with the project for training courses; monthly meeting and the like; stalling the midterm transfer of teacher coordinators working in project schools; issue of orders in respect of the extension of the project to specific districts; exchange of ideas and experiences towards more effective implementation of the programme; to seeking their cooperation and assistance in implementing the project in general and at the school level in particular.

Other Department/Agencies

Fortunately the collaboration has not remained limited to the Education Department. The Governor, the Chief Minister, other members of his Council of Ministers, eminent academics, professionals and citizens, join the different functions organized by CROKSY as special guests at the Inter-District Programmes from time to time. A very positive outcome of this has been the granting of funds for the annual educational tour for students and teachers. The Chief Minister also sanctioned two-day excursions to Phalgam for them.

The relationship building with other departments has also been consciously carried out. The Department of Information has been the most forthcoming and provides assistance at every

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front through its network at the provincial, district and block levels. The Institute of Music and Fine Arts provides guidance to schools for improvement of their cultural programmes. It also invites the project personnel to its productions. Most recently the Institute has offered to conduct low-budget training programmes for our teacher-coordinators to equip them to give better guidance to the cultural activities they organize in terms of direction, stage management, costumes, musical instruments and so on. Doordarshan and Radio Kashmir associate our students with their youth oriented segments. They also give adequate coverage to CROKSY programmes at the school, district and state levels.

The Cultural Academy provides reference materials, books and documents to CROKSY at a very special discount on bulk purchases. It has also offered to examine specific requirements of the project and get the relevant materials prepared.

Advisory Committee

A State Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary to J&K government consisting of eminent professionals and other eminent citizens of the state has been formed. The Committee functions as the apex body that provides policy guidelines for the project. The project team reports to the Committee on the progress made as also the difficulties faced. The Committee meets twice a year.

Principal's Meetings

Meetings of the principals of identified schools are held to explain to them the project objectives and to brief them on

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other modalities for operationalizing the project at the school level. The assistance of the Department is sought to ensure the cooperation of the principals of the identified schools.

Cultural Clubs

Cultural Clubs have been set up at each of the project schools as the instruments through which the Institute organizes relevant activities such as small projects, training courses, lectures, debates, seminars, discussions, quiz programmes, film shows, cultural programmes, magazines, essay competitions, art competitions, inter-institutional and inter-district competitions and other such activities to achieve the objectives laid down. Students are enrolled as members of these clubs on a voluntary basis. The necessary educational materials have been developed by the Institute for use by the members of the cultural clubs. The materials are based on the historical, cultural, social, political and economic dimensions of the life of the Kashmiri youth and their integral linkages with the best in the Indian culture and tradition as well as with the vision of a future India. The necessary linkages with national institutions whether in terms of skill training, employment and educational opportunities or participation in cultural programmes are explored to open up wider opportunities for the Kashmiri youth.

The objectives and the nature of activities to be undertaken by the cultural clubs are explained to the students in the morning assembly where all the students remain present. The dates for such an interaction with the students are fixed in consultation with the principals of the schools.

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After this meeting, students enroll as members of the cultural clubs in each of the schools on a voluntary basis. No membership fee is charged. The number of student members per club varies between 20 and 150. No specific number is treated as sacrosanct.

The work of the clubs has been structured through a uniform timetable made available to all the selected schools wherein exclusive periods every week are earmarked for the project activities. The schools are, however, free to devote additional time to project work on Saturdays or any other days when the students can be spared without any interference with their regular class work.

The members of the ultural lub generally meet on Saturdays in addition to meeting during the periods specifically assigned to project work in the timetable. Small projects of culture related themes of local relevance are assigned to a group of five student-members of cultural clubs. The convenor-teacher assists the students to use appropriate materials for working on the projects. The materials are provided by the Institute. After completion of the projects each group of students submits a brief report on the project work. Prizes are awarded for the project reports judged worthy of such recognition.

Cultural Committees

Each school covered under the project nominates a Cultural Committee consisting of three senior teachers and two senior students to develop and guide the programme on the ground. Each committee formulates the plan of activities for the clubs for

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one academic year and one of the teachers nominated functions as the coordinator of the programme. While the work of cultural clubs is carried out under the guidance of the said committees, the coordinator has the direct responsibility of setting up the clubs, enrolling the student members, running the programme and interacting with the project team at the centre for its smooth and successful functioning.

Curricula

The curricula developed are woven around the humanitarian and secular Sufi heritage of the Kashmiris. This heritage has been classified into 12 areas which are circulated to the project schools. Each area has further been broken into sub-themes. Around 350 sub-themes covering the areas have been listed and again circulated to the schools. The clubs are free to choose the themes of their interest in organizing the club activities or can even select others outside the list circulated. The only condition, however, is that the themes should have a relation with humanitarian cultural values inherited and linked to four modern values, viz., democracy, social justice, human rights and secularism.

Community Work

The programme has introduced the element of community work. Each school has the freedom to define this idea. In Badgam, a school has planted 100 trees. Another school took up water distribution for the *Muharram* processions. Additionally, the students hold rallies and meetings with the members of the

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community to bring about an awareness on subjects such as HIV/AIDS, cancer evil effects of smoking, alcoholism, dowry, use of polythene bags and the imperative of sending children to school, particularly the girls. The students also carry out cleanliness drives around the schools. CROKSY has suggested that the community work programme should be held at least once a month. Another step is to bring in an emphasis on the local culture into the activities of the cultural clubs. Both these ideas are being experimented upon currently. The group hopes to work on creative ways of inter-phasing with the community, so that children's involvement does not remain tokenistic.

Inter-School/District Competitions

The Institute organizes inter-school/district competitions, debates, symposia, discussions and modest cultural programmes, art competitions and essay competitions. Prizes are awarded to the participants judged as worthy of such recognition.

Training Inputs

From time to time training workshops and regular district wise monthly meeting for the coordinators are organized to assess the work done by each cultural club, the impact made by the educational programme on the students, the changes that need to be introduced in the programme and to take stock of the difficulties that they might have faced. The workshops/meetings also give an opportunity to the coordinators to exchange notes on their experiences in running the programme. Two meeting of the heads of project schools during the session are also held district wise.

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Evaluation and Monitoring Systems

The cultural committee in each school meets once each month to plan and review the work. The monthly coordinator's meetings held separately for each district focus on reporting of the programme in schools, the achievements, taking up corrective measures and sharing positive and negative experiences so that the coordinators can learn from each other. Besides, annual evaluation of each student through questionnaires administered by the programme officers and similarly with the coordinators help in monitoring the project.

The programme officers visit schools regularly. Their observations help in monitoring the qualitative aspects of the project. They also know about the number and quality of programmes taken up by the schools, check the attendance registers to review participation of children and take up issues if any with the Chief Coordinator for follow up in the coordinator's meet. Larger problems of dysfunctional clubs, non-performance or non-cooperation of coordinators/principals are taken up at the level for the Chief Education Officer for the district and subsequently the Director, Directorate of Education.

They are, however, accountable to the Chief Coordinator for programmatic, administrative and financial matters. The monthly district level meetings of school coordinators with the Chief Coordinator and with the Director of the project facilitate this.

The team spirit in the staff is positive. The relationship between the Director and the Chief Coordinator is one of mutual respect. A consultation style of communication and decision-making is largely adopted but if there are any differences, they are free to voice them.

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Provisions have been made for an evaluation officer with necessary assistance for regular quantitative and qualitative evaluation and monitoring of the project. A professional evaluator naturally develops indicators or tools for measuring the impact in both directions. Content analysis of poems, essays, write-ups for debates, drawings, painting, etc submitted by the students, and other programmes they participate in form a significant input in the data that helps in assessing the impact of the programme and in recording the subtle changes that are taking place in the thinking of the students. Regular documentation of the process of changes remains integral to the evaluation process.

Before the schools close for the long winter break in December, brief questionnaires are administered to the members of the cultural clubs and cultural committees including the coordinators to elicit a feedback.

More importantly, a comprehensive biannual impact evaluation has been carried out. The first such exercise was undertaken by the project team in 2002. The second one was conducted in 2004 by the Department of Sociology, Kashmir University. The reports are available and have been of immense help in improving the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the programme.

Newsletter

A project newsletter is issued every quarter. It has three sections namely English, Urdu and Kashmiri. Apart from disseminating information to the members of the cultural clubs and the teachers guiding their activities and serving as a vehicle for sharing of experiences, the newsletter publishes contributions from the club

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members and teachers in addition to the relevant contributions from outside to link the readers to a wider social frame. The newsletter attempts to promote creativity and talent wherever identified. It also provides counseling on the opportunities available for their further education, training and employment. The basic thrust is to link the contents of the newsletter to the objectives of the project and their realization.

The editorial staff associates itself with the evaluation and monitoring units and provides whatever inputs the editing and production of the newsletter begets. Since it visits schools regularly to report on the programmes being implemented in each school, it shares the monitoring and documentation work with the evaluation expert. It is pertinent to mention here that the process of monitoring not only checks and reports on the work being done, but also functions as a facilitator for the work of the clubs.

Educational Tours

Educational tours for students are also a part of the agenda of the project. A batch of 70 students and 10 teacher-coordinators visited Mumbai, Goa, Jaipur and Delhi during a 12-day tour in February 2004.

Visibility of the Programme

Earlier CROKSY had chosen to operate on a low profile and had stayed away from media publicity or any form of public presence. This was done for strategic reasons, given the threat from militants to any initiative that gains popularity among people and youth in

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particular. By now CROKSY has established its roots, stabilized as an organization and gained goodwill and support of the school system, the political parties and other stakeholders. The last few years have seen a definite growth of civil society initiatives. As such lately, CROKSY has interacted and projected its programmes through wide coverage in print media, radio and television. Part of this has accrued because Ministers, the Chief Minister and other dignitaries have been invited as chief guest for various functions. The visibility has meant that teachers, students and the CROKSY staff feel greater sense of motivation and recognition. The Government has also offered support by way of education tours and other forms of technical collaboration.

Activities and Impact

The write-up given below detailing the themes covered, activities conducted, trends and departures that have surfaced, and the overall impact observed are drawn from a survey of programme implementation during the session 2004–2005.

Educational Forms

For the first time, the thematic coverage has expanded and diversified. While schools have covered the thematic write-up (around 350 sub-themes) supplies to them by the project team, they have gone beyond this list and added on very significant themes both in relation to their cultural heritage and contemporary concerns.

While the focus on famous luminaries such as Lala Arifa, Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali and Shah-i-Hamadan persists in all the

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schools and through all the educational and cultural forms used, as has been the practice from the very beginning, the schools have turned their attention to other lesser known Sufis, *rishis*, saints, poets and other personalities and chosen them carefully from every region of the Valley.

Thirdly, attention has for the first time been paid to the contribution made by local celebrities from different localities, for instance a village. Thus illustrious people from far flung areas also find a space as their life, work and contribution in different areas get highlighted and disseminated. The students from the distant and backward hamlets/villages experience a sense of honour and pride that their village leaders ancient, medieval or modern, are being known and recognized for the contribution they have made to their life. They also realize that the ideals, values and causes for which these leading lights lived and died, are not relevant today only a specific village, but to the people of the entire Valley.

The issues to which the attention of the students has been drawn have not only attained a high level of diversity and range but an equal level of discernment, judiciousness, accuracy and criticality. For the first time in fact, the students have looked comprehensively at their economic, political and social life—past and present with an eye on the future. So the concerns range from corruption in public life, negative impact of scientific discoveries, noise pollution, importance of population control and religious tolerance in Kashmir. The youth it appears are wide awake and on the move. A look at the thematic breakup indicates not only the wide range of subjects but more importantly the analytical and critical modus operandi and attitude.

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Now the students no longer shy away from looking at religious issues. And here it is heartening to find that the approach is progressive and constructive, and the spotlight for any theme is on what is highly relevant to the present circumstance. So when a lecture is organized on the Prophet of Islam, the theme selected is 'Truth, Peace, Brotherhood and Honesty: Real Teaching of the Prophet'. Similarly in looking at the essence of Islam, the theme chosen for paper reading is 'Islam and Equality'. In looking at the inter-religious relationship in the Valley, students read papers on the 'Tradition of Religious Tolerance in Kashmir' and go beyond to 'Religious Unity in Kashmir' as also to 'Fusion of Religions in Kashmir'.

A more significant trend that has emerged is the recognition of the need to learn about other religions. Under the lecture programme one is organized on 'The Life and Teachings of Guru Nanakji' and the other on the significance of Janam Ashtami and Raksha Bandan. It may be a small step towards inter-faith education but surely an eloquent and meaningful advance.

Among political issues the focus on democracy continues unabated. Here some of the important issues debated were 'The Pen is Mightier than Sword' and 'Rights and Duties Must Go Together'. Paper reading on 'A Weak Democracy is the Root of Violence and Corruption in Public Life' also brought in an examination of the hurdles that weaken democracy. Furthermore, the students were encouraged to give a free run to their imagination, general knowledge, critical thinking and sense of responsibility within a national perspective, when paper-reading sessions were organized on a nebulous theme 'If I were the Prime Minister'. The same exercise was undertaken

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within a regional perspective when a seminar was organized on 'If I were the Chief Minister'. For once the students did not confine themselves to the Valley but looked at the challenges of the Chief Minister from different regions of the J&K State. In both cases, the students made a serious attempt to evaluate the role of the Indian Prime Minister and the state Chief Minister, their strengths and inadequacies and the alternative vision he/she could envisage in terms of leadership qualities and national/state policies and their implementation.

A dimension introduced for the first time persuaded students to look beyond the frontiers of their country when the students debated the theme 'United Nations is Irrelevant to Present Day Problems'. All told, the horizons expanded in different directions to enable the students to look at the state, the nation and the globe as an integral whole within which they could have a role and responsibility as enlightened citizens.

This probably explains a more substantial attention to youth issues. Here, the problems of youth in general and those of Kashmiri youth in particular came in for a critical examination. Two other specific concerns in this regard that were discussed in a seminar and paper reading session were 'Westernization of Youth' and 'Television and our Youth' respectively, where the students saw a direct relationship between the two. Finally a more constructive activity turned out to be the essay competition on 'Building Kashmir of Our Dreams: The Role of Youth'. In this effort the students defined their role and delineated the competencies, skills and attitudes that would equip them to realize the vision of the Kashmir of their dreams, irrespective of the problems they face now and will face in playing the said role.

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This made for a lot of introspection and serious contemplation on the vision as well as on the strategies for its realization.

A close look at the history and culture of Kashmir has remained a constant exercise ever since the project was launched. What is new this time is the study of Kashmiri monuments, archeological sights such as Burzhama in a historical perspective, subjects like the Kashmiri proverbs and riddles and more importantly human values and Kashmiri culture, as also the theme of 'Impact of West on Our Culture'. Hence while, on one hand the knowledge base on the Kashmiri heritage has widened, on the other the interaction with the western cultures and their impact brings in the dimension of the opening up of Kashmiri culture to modern influences and whatever has been absorbed there from. This indeed is a healthy trend in as much as the students comprehend the fact that however distinct and different their culture may be, it cannot remain insular and circumscribed any longer. East and West must meet and enrich their culture in the process.

Among the current concerns emerging from the social scenario, attention has been paid to subjects such as 'commercialization of marriage', the controversial 'guest control order' issued by the state government, 'indiscipline in society' and the 'generation gap' (Parents are always right: decision makers even if wrong cannot be told so). Some attention has been paid to the rural-urban divide ('rural life is more civilized than the urban'). In the same context 'changing life style of Kashmiris with special emphasis on the evil effects of smoking and alcoholism' is analysed critically along with the exhortation that 'material progress alone is no progress'. In covering each of these themes, the social, and moral dimension remain the high points in an equal measure.

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The issues detailed above are not far-fetched abstractions for the students. They are the problems they confront in their everyday life. Solutions to these problems have to be found at the individual, familial or social levels. No governmental interventions can help. This realization leads on to serious thinking on how the tough challenge can be met.

The psychological condition of the adolescents in general has been a subject of interest throughout. During the session, however, an addition was a special paper reading session on the topic 'Adolescence Period of the Girls'. The session brought out an awareness of their state of mind and body during this period. This indicates a diagnostic approach to the problem which is an improvement on the earlier treatment. While youth alienation has been a continuous interest, examining Khasalhat and natural instinct was an important addition. So was the problem of indiscipline and the statement that 'Discipline Must Come from Within'. This falls in place because of the general trend of branching out and deepening interest.

Something that should cause concern is the theme 'Kashmiri outside the Valley: He is the 'Other''. This perception of the students reflects a sense of alienation and feeling that Kashmiris outside the Valley are not treated as a normal or integral segment of the Indian society. This is a serious problem which calls for a solemn reflection inhouse before any concrete steps can be planned and taken to dislodge this imagined or real feeling.

When it comes to moral issues, the theme 'Morality' itself comes up again and again in varied forms. So we have seminars on 'Education and Moral Values, Human Values and Kashmiri Culture'; debate on 'Not Laws but our Values will Profit us

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and Protect our Democracy'; group discussions on 'Morality and Islam'; paper reading on 'Erosion of Social Values, Moral Education and its Efficacy', 'I am a Good Kashmiri'; and lectures on 'Morality and Islam'. The application of moral principles and values in day-to-day life is discussed in simple propositions like 'respect your elders', 'good manners', 'magic effects of polite conversation', 'cleanliness is a blessing', 'rights of parents and duties of children', '*haya nahi zamane ko*', and '*naseehat amez batein*'. More importantly value inculcation gets reinforced in studying the life and teachings of the great saints, *rishis*, philosophers, kings, poets and reformers and the pregnant and eloquent incidents of their lives. During the session, around 40 personalities who lived in different historical periods were covered through different programmes, educational as well as cultural. While these great men and women filled the students with great pride in their heritage, the impact in respect of their values and attitudinal changes was dominant and obvious. Furthermore, the cogitation restores their humanism and identity and inspires them to fight for ideas and causes, and gives them the confidence that they can give meaning to their life in working for peace and prosperity of their land.

This resolve finds reflection when they look for strategies they need to use for achieving their goals. This is where the economic and environmental issues taken up give us the clues. Many schools held seminars on challenges of human resource development, problems of people of hill areas, forests and their importance, Mughal Gardens and tourism in Kashmir, environmental awareness, environmental degradation of Dal Lake and the Chinar tree. Group discussions were held on

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the problems of rural areas and their solutions, and tourism in Kashmir. Paper-reading sessions also covered the economic lifeline, with subjects such as uses and importance of forests in Kashmir; environmental pollution and preservation; plantation and its importance; survival of natural resources; handicrafts of Kashmir; importance of population control; flora and fauna of Kashmir; tourism: impact on socio-economic life of people; lakes and their preservation; Kashmiri herbs and their uses; water pollution; problems of rural Kashmir; and polythene: a threat to agriculture. Once again the symposia organized covered subjects such as environment and we, conservation of energy, and Kashmiri arts and crafts and environmental awareness. Lectures were delivered on environmental preservation; plantation; the Dal Lake; medicinal value of plants with special reference to Kashmir; tourism in Kashmir; and fruits of Kashmir. Once again the preservation of natural resources; tourism in Kashmir; preservation of Dal Lake; Kashmiri flora and fauna; the preservation of the Wular Lake; and environmental awareness were selected as subjects for essay writing competitions.

The subjects listed make for a repetitive strain. But the fact remains that forests, tourism, handicrafts and fruits are crucial to Kashmiri economy. Environmental degradation, whether of Dal Lake or the Wular, is a catastrophe. Population control (something taboo for a Muslim society) is a most welcome and daring thematic addition and conservation energy is a burning issue for the energy-starved state.

That one of the routes to peace is the economic restructuring and development and if the youth have to understand the how and why of this process now and for future, the issues taken up need to be discussed and debated widely and repeatedly. Drawing

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attention to specific problems of rural Kashmir and the hilly areas in particular is pivotal if the perspectives and priorities of the students have to be in order.

It stands to reason that the framework of strategies mentioned earlier can and do emerge through these debates and discussions that give them the knowledge base, and the directions on how to strengthen it further for concrete action.

An important development during the session was a close look at educational matters. The imperative of education for all, the cruciality of literacy, the primacy of primary education, the importance of women's education, the status of girls education in the state, was the set of themes on which seminars were held in different schools. Secondly, the states and the role of the teacher in school and society, particularly in building a modern society and student-teacher relationship were the subjects for paper reading. Two important themes taken up for paper reading again were 'Examination: Not a Test of Ability' and 'Education—Means of Exploitation'. Both these subjects are rather startling, the latter in particular. May be a Paulo Frierean or Illichian influence on some teacher helped them to look at the system as an exploitative structure. Whatever the incentive, the selection of the theme was a very bold and solid contribution, enabling the students to examine the subsystem of education as a means of structural violence that negates peace. One may wonder at this bold initiative but such initiatives can have far reaching implications for the development of the critical faculties of the students and for widening of their horizons.

The other themes selected were 'Education and Moral Values', 'Indiscipline among Students' and more conceptual ventures such as 'An Ideal Teacher' and 'Education is Light'.

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A matter of deep satisfaction was a more extensive and sympathetic attention to women's issue. Earlier on students had been looking at the modern/working women as a destabilizer of the family and society. During the session under reference, they took the issue of sex discrimination head on and examined their present position in the Kashmiri society, their predicament in terms of the affliction of dowry, Purdah system, as also the perception and belief that a daughter is a burden on her parents.

Furthermore, seminars were organized on 'Education of Girls in Kashmir' and the 'Importance of Women's Education'. Discussion groups discussed the role of women in preserving culture. Paper-reading sessions were organized on their role as mothers in environmental preservation and nation building, and a more germane subject, the 'Status of Women in Islam'. Finally a lecture was organized on 'The Changing World of Kashmiri Women'.

Similarly, language issues received a broader coverage as compared to efforts in the earlier sessions. Paper-reading sessions were held on the 'Importance of Mother Tongue'; 'Present Position of Kashmiri Language'; 'Kashmiri Language: Growth and Prospectus'; 'Dialects of Kashmiri'; 'Learn Kashmiri Language'; 'Kashmiri Language: Now and Then'; and 'Kashmiri Language in the Present Educational Scenario'. Two provocative themes debated were: 'No Point in Exaggerating the Importance of Kashmiri' and 'Is Kashmiri Language Regressing or Progressing?' There lectures were organized on Kashmiri language and its future and there was an essay competition on the same subject.

The current status of Kashmiri language is a very emotive issue because Kashmiri is not a medium of education at any level.

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And people in general are sore with the Government that as a policy, the language has never been given its due with the result that Kashmiris cannot read and write the language. Elites are, of course, not concerned. For them English medium educational institutions build the careers of their wards in the national and international market, where Kashmiri has no value.

It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the students look at the language issue critically and rationally. That they had the opportunity of serious reflection on the cultural, political, social and economic dimensions of the issues involved in analysing the status of an prospectus for the development of the Kashmiri language—a crucial factor in the renewal of the culture and identity should again be a mater of satisfaction.

A beginning has also been made in introducing the students to issues with regard to developments in science and technology. Group discussions deliberated upon the negative impact of scientific inventions and on ways to avoid noise pollution. Subsequently, both the subjects were taken up again for paper-reading exercises in addition to similar themes under the titles 'Science—a Blessing or Curse?' and 'Use of Science in Daily Life'. Paper-reading sessions were also organized on medicinal value of plants, HIV/AIDS, Kashmiri herbs and their uses and the like.

Having introduced the students to these kinds of issues, a greater effort in this direction needs to be put in, given the far-reaching developments taking place in the area of science and technology.

Conferences were organized on religions themes. These were help either before or immediately after Id, or *Shab-e-Miraj*. Others discussed the fundamentals of Islam and the life

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and teachings of the Prophet. It appears sometimes that too much of preoccupation with such themes in most educational forms used is not a healthy trend. But as long as a progressive and constructive analysis is attempted, the demand from the students as well as the teachers for a dominant emphasis on these issues needs to be met. Such an approach is always insisted upon after the activity plans for the session are submitted by the Coordinators and subsequently discussed with them.

Two salient additions of far-reaching consequences during the session were community activities and visits. Each school was given the freedom to define the date. CROKSY suggested that the community activity be held at least once a month and an attempt be made to bring in an emphasis on the local culture into the activities of the clubs.

In Budgam, a school planted 100 trees. Another school took up water distribution for the *Muharram* procession. Additionally, students help rallies to bring about AIDS awareness, about the dreaded disease cancer, on deadly effects of smoking and alcoholism, one in support of sending children to school, the girls in particular and a mass health awareness programme focussed on the common diseases in the area. Meetings were held with the members of the community and students from other schools to discuss the issue of environmental pollution, the social menace of dowry and evil effects of smoking and to share cultural information. A week-long awareness programme on traffic rules was another highlight. So was collection of polythene bags and their disposal followed by a meeting with the shopkeepers of the main bazaar on the need to use paper bags only. Plantation and cleanliness drives were undertaken in the schools and the

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surrounding areas including a mosque. Finally the most educative experience turned out to be a survey of cobbler's houses in the surrounding areas to study their living conditions.

Fortunately, the students enjoyed their interaction with the community beyond our expectations. Probably because it was an interesting and educative departure from the school routine and the indoor CROSKY activities.

Among the visits organized, the trip to Dachigam National Park where the students learnt about the preservation of flora and fauna including endangered species such deer, leopard, etc., was the most exciting. As the word spread, demands from other schools mounted. However, visits to Ganderbal Power Project and handicraft exhibition had significant lessons of its own kind for the enquiring and inquisitive minds. Apart from the conventional visits to holy shrines and cultural historical landmarks of a district, a visit was organized to an orphanage. This visit had both negative and positive impacts. On one hand, students were reported to have experienced a sadness on meeting the homeless children, more particularly because most of them turned out to be the products of terrorism. On the other, the students had a feel of what havoc terrorism has played in depriving the young ones of the love and care of their parents, the security of their homes, the opportunity of a normal healthy life and above all else a future of hope and confidence. For days after the event the students kept on discussing and sharing their thoughts and feelings. They asked whether CROKSY could take some responsibility for the orphans and better still, whether they could collect funds from their around Id or any other festival to send a donation.

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Such experiences are bound to create an awareness of the social reality which the students must grapple with. A deep reflection will obviously lead them to examine their own ideas and assumptions, attitudes and convictions and to look at their situation objectively and dispassionately. Hopefully, they will, as a consequence, redefine their role and responsibilities and rise up to fight the vested interest that exhorted and continues to exhort them to follow blindly a path that led a whole generation to its nemesis.

Mention may also be made of some other innovative confidence-building activities which gave them an opportunity for an autonomous, unhibited creative expression of their capabilities. Such activities took the form of unguided write ups on any topic of their choice, monologues, comical, satirical and hilarious items such as mock news reading, *Mehfil-e-Mizah* and presentations like *Gulzar Hai Gulza Hai*.

These are activities not imposed, not directed or guided or planned in advance. Here the students let go and critique the world that the adults have created for them. They provide a mirror to the adults so that they look into their faces straight and unmasked. Such inter generations encounters are an exercise in relaxation and friendliness on the one hand and criticism and stern warning on the other.

Among all the themes a seminar programme, paper-reading sessions and essay competitions on the holy shrines of Kashmir was a very welcome endeavour. That is because the shrines of the Sufis and Rishis of Kashmir are the living symbols that represent the unique composite Islamic culture as it evolved in Kashmir as against the *Wahabi* interpretation. This is what

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renders a Kashmiri Muslim so distinct and different. Little wonder that the shrines draw crowds of all hues—Muslims and non-Muslims who profess unflinching faith in the indigenous luminaries even today.

Finally a few programmes related to the traditional sports of Kashmir. This is a discourse which has been an in thing from the very beginning. Understandably, modem sports also did find some space for the first time. This makes for lesson in tradition and modernity.

Cultural Forms

Cultural programmes attracted a higher level of participation and talent. Students take to it like a duck takes to water. The most popular forms used were as usual from the folk arena. Without exception the schools organized a variety of folk singing and dance items. *Chakkri*, folk group singing to the accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments, was the most celebrated and favoured activity followed by *Rauf*, the every home and every occasion folk dance. The other two forms of folk dance, including the aggressive *Dambali* and *Bachcha Nagma*, made an appearance for the first time. Singing of Kashmiri folk songs was routine except the *Band Pather* folk singing with an intense movement and action which was performed occasionally. Punjabi songs and dance (*Giddha*) was performed at schools from Baramulla and Budgam districts. The solo satirical monologue *Laddishah* has remained a much sought after activity as was the case through earlier sessions. However *Wanwun* (songs sung on the occasion of marriage) was an addition. Singing competitions

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in Urdu, Hindi and Kashmiri also were conducted. More serious efforts produced musical concerts which included classical music items such as *Hafiz Nagma* and *Bansari Vadan a*nd semi-classical rendering of Kashmiri and Urdu *ghazals*. Singing of *Pahari* songs was a special feature at schools from the Uri sector. So were the *Gojri* cultural shows that reflected the *Gojri* cultural specificities. Solo and group action songs addressed issues like national integration, patriotism and importance of education.

Within the cultural dimension also as was the ease thought the educational forms, there was a preoccupation with religions renderings. There was a spate of *Naat* recitations and competitions of Quranic verses, *Qirat* competitions, *Manqabat Khawani* and *Soorah Fateh* recitation. In fact, every cultural and educational programme starts with a *Naat* recitation. A research exercise into the motivation for such a preoccupation and its impact would be worthwhile. Hopefully, IPRA may conduct such an exercise in the near future.

Fortunately, the recitation programmes did not stop here. They extended to the Shaivite and Sufi saints Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali whose *Vakhs* and poems were reproduced with great love and reverence. Poets such as Shamas Faqir, Mohd Gani, Rasool Mir and Haba Khatoon, as also the modern poets Azad and Mahjoor too received considerable attention.

Finally, *Qawali* programmes and *Mehfil-e-Musharia* were conducted in a number of schools.

While the programmes detailed above follow the conventional pattern, the skits and plays enacted presented a more diverse picture. Here the focus was on contemporary concerns. These programmes attract the more talented and forward-looking

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students who are prepared to put in any number of hours and efforts to perform well, and that they do.

Social issues such as the mother-in-law syndrome, the scourge of illiteracy and the value of education, drug abuse, the incorrigible bureaucrat, the shame of dowry, the quacks exploiting the vulnerable and the demands of a changing social order were brought into focus, with a lot of sensitivity. Moral issues such as the cruciality of honesty truthfulness, brotherhood, modesty and humanity and the scourge of value erosion in today's world were portrayed powerfully. The innocence and simplicity of the shepherd girl and the plight of the stupid were delicate portrayals of the positive and the negative in human nature. The comical representations depicted bizarre human situations.

But in all these efforts the creativity, imagination and confidence of the actors in playing the role assigned to them were not only obvious but remarkable too.

A continuing feature in the cultural domain has been the organization of painting completions. These competitions attracted more participants from urban and semi-urban areas than the remote areas. While an effort needs to be made to identity talent in the latter areas, the training of the students and teachers will require the assistance of the cultural academy. In the next session, CROKSY plans to organize a course for teachers as well for the interested students from these areas with the necessary background motivation and talent to enable them to pursue their interest in the arts.

During the session, painting and drawing competitions were organized on eight specific themes namely 'Cultural Heritage of Kashmir'; 'The Scenic Beauty of Kashmir'; 'Flora and Fauna

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of Kashmir'; 'Birds of Kashmir'; 'Kashmiri Mountains, Lakes, Waterfalls'; 'Shepherds'; and 'Air Pollution'. As one looks at drawings and paintings, one is struck by the imagery and colours used to give creative expression to their conceptions, impressions, observation and consciousness on the subjects they interpret. Some of the participants in the competitions could well emerge as professional artists if given the necessary opportunities to develop their talent.

An activity that was introduced for the first time was a story writing competition. This gave an opportunity to students with literary skills and aspirations to use their imagination in defining and describing their inverse and the complex relationships therein. With the necessary guidance and encouragement to the author some of the short stories may find a place in the CROKSY Newsletter. That might put them on the path to creative writing as a hobby or a profession.

Cumulative Impact

In interpreting the data analysed through exercise undertaken, one has to keep in mind the background of the students and the teachers. One has also to be aware of the environment in which the schools functioned and the project got operationalized. The schools started functioning after a decade of all-pervading violence, insecurity, fear and chaos. The teachers had been idling away their time and the students got promoted year to year without any regular study and without facing any kind of evaluation or examinations. Incredible as it may sound, there was 90 per cent pass percentage in the matriculation

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examination conducted by the Board of School Education in 1990. Mass copying was a regular feature at all levels. After the elections were held and the elected government took over the reins of administration in 1996, it faced the impossible task of activating the school system which was literally in shambles. It goes to the credit of Department of Education that it sent a message home that teachers will have to teach and the students will have to attend the classes. Speedy measures were taken to repair and rebuild school buildings that had been burnt down, to rationalize the posting of teachers in different parts of the Valley and to ensure a fair measure of accountability.

By the time the project was launched in March 1999, the situation had acquired near normalcy. However, during our visits to and discussions with the heads of the institutions and the teachers, the apprehensions and fears lurking in the air were clearly visible and articulate. And yet the project received acceptance because the teachers felt that here was a chance for the students to open up, to vent their pent up views, feelings and aspirations and to express and develop their talent and creativity. There was a risk of course, but the risk was worth taking. Such views were shared by the parents also when the teachers sounded them on the project and sought their approval.

The monitoring and evaluatory processes undertaken confirm that not only was the risk worth taking but the project activities turned out to be the most appropriate instruments of diminishing if not eliminating, the gloom and the apathy the students were engulfed in. They took to the cultural openings like a duck takes to water. Slow and diffident to start with, they gained confidence gradually and responded with the expected

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enthusiasm. This encouraged the teachers who found that the students were more serious on their curricular studies also than they had been before the launch of the project. This feeling has been repeatedly expressed by co-ordinates in their monthly meetings with the project team.

In the beginning it appeared that there was a conflict in the minds of the respondents about apparent contradictions and distance between tradition which was at times equated with superstitions and ignorance and modernity which was perceived as decentralizing, irreligious and inhuman. However, as the project activities preceded, the contradictions seemed to have got resolved gradually. The credit for this process must go to the members of the cultural committees, the coordinators in particular, who helped the students to appreciate the fact that the positive aspects of the tradition and modernity have got to be sifted from their negative aspects. There was no shame in throwing out superstition and ignorance that might have come thought the traditional thinking or practices. Similarly it was necessary to fight the damaging effects of the modernity paradigm be it the impersonal, mechanical life styles, promotion of selfishness and cut throat competition attendant upon the primacy of the market or commercialization through the media or otherwise.

The conflictual perceptions of the students are repeatedly brought under discussion in the meetings of the coordinators, writer's workshops and the orientation courses organized for coordinators by the project team. Promotion of this discourse, which naturally percolates down to the students through the subsequent activities in which they continue to participate,

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is one of the major contributions made by the project to the development of a critical and objective thinking among the students. This dialogue has made a significant dent at the attitudinal level and made it possible for students and teachers both to examine critically the dynamic inter-play and tensions crated by the social forces released by the change processes unleashed. This becomes patently visible from school to school, from debate to debate, discussion to discussion and seminar to seminar. That is so even in the plays, skits enacted as well as the songs sung. At times the participants produce brutal satires on the role of the politicians, on the violation of human right and the blind aping of the western styles of life by the middle class in particular.

The perception of students on the cumulative impact of the activities in which they participated is on expected lines. Better awareness of their heritage makes them feel proud and determined to continue a search for their true identity. They see the relevance of this heritage to their present day problems. At the same time their attention gets drawn to issues that have not entered their mental frame before. That is to say, start looking deeply at the problems and controversies they face. So deep is the impact that they feel compelled to share these problems with their family members, friends and others. The important point that emerges here is that students for the first time look at their past and present and probably future as well as a process of continuity and change. In facing these problems they recognize their own role which leads them to share their problems with their family members, friends and others. Ostensibly to locate the parameters of the processes that they have to grapple with

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would determine the directions that the change processes should take and to identify a role for themselves.

While experiencing a feeling of pride in their heritage they have to look outside its frame to find solutions for the problems in changed circumstances. That is probably why they are determined to continue the search for their true identity and at the same time adjust to a fast changing world. The participation in the programmes has led them to an aspiration of finding their true identity within a world of multiple identities and contradictory demands made by a totally different examine their own thoughts, emotional and behavioral patterns. As such with regard to the development of their personalities as also their relationships, the perceptions of the students on the impact of the project activities on them, are significant.

One can reasonably surmise that for the students a window has opened up to their past, present and future and through this window learn to look at things knowledgeably and critically. One can also say that the new knowledge and awareness has diverted them from the beaten track, the complacency, the smugness and the gloom that had overtaken them during the preceding decade.

The opening up of the window has further led them to think of ways and means they can adopt for disseminating the knowledge, values and skills they have acquired as a result of their association with the project. They start with their homes, hold discussions with family members and peers and promote democratic attitudes at home and work place. More importantly, they seem to have moved towards a social commitment. They want to fight injustice at every level and set up organizations

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and movements to fight for their rights and duties. In aid of these objectives they would also like to bring about awareness through the print and electronic media.

The above aspirations and plans may look like a tall order but the students think that they will do it. Not merely in respect of changing their own thoughts and attitudes but helping others to do the same within the family and in the society our there. Happily the project has helped them to break their alienation, to relate meaningfully to other selves and to develop the necessary competence and confidence to participate in building structures (of consciousness and of society) conducive to a culture of peace.

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Glossary

Abhishek — The consecration with holy waters.

Agraharas — Clusters of houses in a village where Brahmins live; land holdings which yielded rich revenues to the recipients of such gifts.

Appams — Special sweet rice cakes.

Arahant — An acolyte in the Buddhist tradition.

Azaan — The call to the prayer from the minaret to the mosque.

Badaam — Almonds

Begar — Free labour

Bhadrapada — A month of the Hindu calendar

Bhoj — In Kashmiri, the shrub/tree is called *Burza*. The botanical name is *Veutala alnoid*. The leaves of the tree are used in the worship of Shiva (*bhoj patre* or *bael patte*). The bark was used for paper and also as insulation for the roofs of house in the old days, before the use of shingles or corrugated iron sheets for roofing. The roofs were then covered with a layer of mud to keep the house warm in winter.

Damaras — A class of cultivators and land owning people in the Kashmiri Valley in ancient times who by virtue of their wealth emerged as a powerful

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group that were responsible for the overthrow of King Harsha. Though wealthy and powerful, they were an uncultured lot.

Datura	Thorn Apple
Dandi	A wicker chair, attached to poles. Very similar to a palanquin or *palki*, which is carried by porters.
Doshala	Shawl
Elaichi	Green Cardamom
Gaddi	Throne
Ghanas	Traditionally, the term refers to attendants of Shiva; the forces surrounding him that are also propitiated and worshipped during the Shivratri puja.
Guru	In this context it is the teacher, as well as in earlier times the initiator of the young person into the meditative produces involved in Kashmir Shaivism (Trika).
Hakh	Saag
Hanjis	The class of boatmen who live in *doongas* (boats) on the Dal Lake and on the river Jhelum in Kashmir. They are people who earn their livelihood on the water—ferrying passengers, and lately, owning and running the houseboats that serve as temporary residences for the visitors to the Valley.
Jagir	Grants of land by a ruler to a subject for valuable service rendered to him.
Jagirdar	The holder of a *jagir* (lands) granted by a ruler to him.

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Kangri	The 'fire-pot' that is carried and used by Kashmiris in the bitter cold of winters. It is an earthenware pot enclosed in an insulating cover with a handle of wicker-work basketry. It holds live coals made from the Chinar leaves and branches that fall in autumn and are collected by the locals. Under the voluminous uni-sex wool garment (the *pheran*), it provides each person with his own portable heater indoors or out. It lasts all day long, and some people even also use it to warm their beds at night.
Kath baat	Discussions
Kehva	Tea
Khadawan	Wooden sandals
Khalsa	Referring to wastelands (in revenue assessment); probably a corruption of the word '*Khali*' meaning empty.
Khanqah	A building designed specifically for gatherings of a Sufi brotherhood, and is a place for spiritual retreat and character reformation.
Khas-khas	Poppy seeds
Kheer	A sweet made with rice, milk and sugar.
Khicher	Gruel made of rice and lentils.
Khutba	A speech or address to a gathering; refers to addressing public meetings.
Kulcha	bread
Madrassa	Arabic word for school and is used to refer to an Islamic religious school.
Maike	Paternal home
Maktab	Elementary school attached to a mosque.

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Maulvi	A cleric in a mosque; Islamic scholar or preacher.
Mehendi	Henna
Misl	Armed forces of various Sikh (sects) in the Punjab in the late 1700s.
Mufti	Civil garb as opposed to military uniform.
Mungwer	Small cakes made of ground lentils.
Nagas	They were historical people of the same name; snake worshipping Shakas (Scythians) of the trans-Himalayan region. According to mythology, Nagas were the sons of Rishi Kashyapa and his wife Kadru who are credited with founding the Naga nation. The Nagas belonged to Patala, also called Nagaloka, probably referring to the Himalayan foot-hills and Kashmir. They were constantly at war with the Aryans and after losing their original homelands moved farther south to the region of the Vindhyas and the Narmada and beyond. They were an ancient and respected tribe of India that played a historical role. Several dynasties claim origin from them, and many places all over India were and are named after them—Taxila (after the Naga king Takshaka), Nagpur, Nagapattinam, Nagakoil.
Namkaran	Naming of the child.
Naya	New
Nazarana	A tribute (in the form of a gold coin or other valuable present) presented to the ruler of a

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princely state on the occasion of an audience at the durbar (court).

Niarwan — The cord made of raw cotton (several strands) that is dyed red and is tied on the wrists of all participants in a *yagya* or *hawan*; on the left wrist for married women and the right one for men and other unmarried persons. At certain Kashmiri ceremonies, several stands of these were tied to the *atheroos* of married women usually by their husbands. This custom has fallen into disuse generally.

Pathshala — School meant for Hindu students not necessarily attached to a temple.

Phalgun — A month in the Hindu calendar.

Pishacha — In the *Rig Veda* there is a reference to a red haired/blonde roaring Pishachi (1.133.5). The *Atharva Veda* has references to them as the enemies of the Aryan communities—driving them out of their homes and villages. They are described as vile and malignant. Panini in his *Ashtadhyayi* describes them as a warrior clan. The *Mahabharata* also describes them as warriors of north-west (the Dard tribe). These tribe came into the Kashmir Valley from their homes in the high Himalayas to escape the winter. They are also identified as the stone carvers and wood carves of the region.

Qand — Sugar candy offerings.

Rahdari — A system in medieval Kashmir to ensure that

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the people from the Valley did not leave it without the necessary permission from the authorities. In different times, whole sections of the population fled from the Valley to escape whatever dire situation they faced, leading to depletion of the population.

Raj Tilak — Alludes to the vermilion mark (of saffron paste) of anointment on the forehead which is part of the coronation ceremony of Indian Hindu rulers.

Ram Bror — Literally Ram (*Purushottam, Maryada Purush*, the ideal man). '*Bror*' in Kashmiri is a cat. Here there is a different context in the combination of Rama with the cat image—the sly sneaky animal which will come into a house and eat anything it can find. During the month of *Pausa* when the *Ghar Devta* (the resident spirit in the home) is offered a propitiation of cooked rice and fish, it is usually consumed by an elusive cat, traditionally a white cat that is supposed to be an attendant of Kuber, the lord of wealth and prosperity. In this context, the person who knocks on the door and answers to the name of *Ram Bror* represents the benevolent entity that brings the blessing of wealth, health and prosperity to the family after the Shivratri puja.

Rishi Bhumi — Literally the 'Land of the Rishis'. From the earliest of times, the idyllic and picturesque

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	Kashmir Valley has drawn seekers of the Absolute Truth to it, whether they were Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh or of any other religion. The numerous *tirthas* or power places scattered all over the Valley have provided there seekers—*rishis* and mystics of all shades—with inspiration.
Sandhis	A cover term for a wide variety of phonological processes that occur at morpheme or word boundaries.
Shakkar	Unrefined sugar
Shakta	Kashmiri Pandit are devotees of Shiva and Shakti—the energy or force manifested by female principle. A Shakta is a devotee of Shiva/ Shakti in a Non-Vedic, Non-Aryan tradition; in this case the Trika School of Kashmir Shaivim.
Shali	Unhusked paddy
Stotra	From the Sanskrit term '*sthuti*'; a metrical composition chanted or sung in praise of a god or other exalted being during a Hindu religious ceremony.
Subah	A province (under the Mughals)
Subehdar	Governor of the province.
Sutak	Pollution by a breath taking place in the home. Wealth also was a polluting factor.
Taranga	Wave
Tava	Griddle
Thal	Tray

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Thokur Kuth	Prayer room
Thumbak Nare	A unique drum fashioned from a hollow earthenware tube over the mouth of which is stretched a leather cover.
Varna Vibhaga	Division of society according to social order or caste.
Vazir	High-ranking political advisor.
Wazarat	The term refers to a district that was administered by a Wazir appointed by the Maharaja during the Dogra rule in Jammu and Kashmir.
Yakshas	Referred to in the *Rig Veda* (VII.18.9) as a people (*yakshāvah*); a person or a group of persons. Yakshas are both good and evil, as a rule kindly. In this context, kindly—who helped the old couple by protecting them from the inimical forces around, the Nagas and Pishachas, in return for the *khichri* offered to them.
Ziarat	A tomb of a *rishi* or *pir* or other spiritually evolved person, which attracts pilgrims to it.

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Sneak Preview

- Kota Rani was young and apparently a realist, who saw in Rinchen's offer of marriage a means to restore peace in the Valley. Rinchen converted to Islam and took the name Sadr-ud-din. During his three-year rule, Kota assisted him ably in ruling the country. On his death, she, instead of putting the minor Haidar on the throne, saw her husband's death as an opportunity to restore the earlier lost Hindu dynasty.
- The Aryans in India allowed their women a great deal of freedom. They were never veiled and participated at court and public events. Queens were crowned side by side with the kings, and had their own treasurers and councillors. They also had the benefit of education, as did their Brahmin sisters.
- The Rishi Movement, a Sufi movement which engulfed Kashmir during the 15th–18th Centuries, challenged the status and role of women and encouraged them to resist their earlier subordination to men under the Brahmin patriarchy. Lal Ded represented the foremost among such women. Now where in the writings of the Hindu historians of the time is she mentioned and the first writings about her are by Muslims, much after her time.
- During Afghan times, there had been mass exoduses of the community to escape the terror unleashed on them. Pandit women were abducted to be sent back to Afghanistan. Consequently, Kashmiri Pandits adopted the purdah system and kept their women closely cloistered. The search for a husband would be initiated as soon as a girl reached puberty. This was particularly witnessed in troubled times such as the time of the Muslim rulers.
- Birth of a girl child was not a particularly welcome event. She was treated as some other family's *amanat*. This was the attitude prevalent amongst most patriarchal families in India but more so in Kashmir with its long turbulent history of foreign invasions.

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